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LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE

PARSHAS MATOS-MASEI

BY
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LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE

ESSAYS ON PARSHAS MATOS-MASEI

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Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who, more than any Jewish leader, has prepared us for Moshiach and the imminent Redemption

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INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *parshas Matos-Masei* was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

> "The time of your Redemption has arrived."

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to

help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *galus*/exile mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

Matos and Masei both have a connection to Moshiach. Matos, which means "staffs" is also a metaphor for Moshiach who is referred to as such in Psalm 110:2.

Masei, which means Journeys contains all of the 42 journeys of the Jewish people in the desert as well as all the journeys of the Jewish people through their entry into the Promised Land with Moshiach at their head.

ESSAY ONE

HOW SACRED IS YOUR WORD?

When a person feels incapable of dealing with temptation the Torah provided a vow.

The vow is not just a psychological boost to buttress one's inner strength and character.

It actually generates greater G-dly energy helping the person to combat his weak nature.

ESSAY ONE

HOW SACRED IS YOUR WORD?

Solemn Vows

Oaths and vows are devices used – even in the secular world – to add solemnity to one's statements, and veracity to one's testimony. Witnesses are "sworn in" before they testify; doctors take the Hippocratic Oath before they are allowed to practice medicine, etc. In addition – within the Jewish legal framework – a vow is a method by which one can distance oneself from a given object, behavior or person.

The latter form of a vow is the subject of this week's Torah portion, Matos. A person who utters a promise in the name of G-d is duty bound by Jewish law to abide by this vow. For example, one who utters a vow not to eat bread is forbidden to eat bread. For this person, bread is as non-kosher as a piece of pork!

Retroactive

Yet, despite the fact that the Torah imposes a strict prohibition against eating the food that one vowed not to eat, the Torah provided a means to rescind this vow. By coming before a Jewish court and expressing regret for having made the vow, the rabbis have the power to nullify the vow. So strong is the power vested in them by the Torah, that the vows effect is nullified retroactively!

An illustration of retroactive nullification of a vow is provided by the Talmud. A man marries a woman with the stipulation that she has not made any vows that might interfere with their relationship. He states emphatically at the marriage ceremony that, if there are any such vows, the marriage is null and void. The Talmud points out that if in fact the woman had made such a vow but – subsequent to the marriage – she had the vow annulled by a Jewish court, she is considered married. Though at the time of the marriage she had such a vow which – based on the groom's stipulation – nullified the marriage, the rabbi's annulment worked retroactively to uproot that vow and rewrite history. It is considered as if the vow had never been made!

Needless to say, retroactive nullification of a prohibition is a difficult concept to digest.

How could something be considered a crime on Sunday, while the same act would not be a crime on Monday? Moreover, how can we explain how the vows that we violated on Sunday – and were regarded as violations then – are, in retrospect, considered to be no violation, once nullified by three rabbis on Tuesday?

True Intention

The halachic (Jewish legal) rationale for this phenomenon is that a vow is only as good as the intention that goes into it. When the rabbis nullify the vow they do it by demonstrating to the one who made the vow that he or she really did not consider all the ramifications of this action, and that deep down, he or she did not ever really and wholeheartedly make the vow in the first place.

The Mystical and Chassidic approach to this concept is to first focus on the very purpose of a vow. When a person feels incapable of dealing with temptation for a given thing, and it threatens to overwhelm the individual, the Torah provided a vow. It is not just a psychological boost to buttress one's inner strength and character, but, it actually generates greater G-dly energy that gives the person greater fortitude to combat the individual's weak nature.

When the person has successfully dealt with the temptation, the person can then rise to a higher level. By

going to the three rabbis – in whom the Torah vested the power to nullify a vow – they actually enable the person to reveal an even higher aspect of G-dly energy (or: spiritual potential) than that which was revealed by way of the vow. Now, the person has the energy to transform that which was forbidden by virtue of the vow into a permissible act. There is no longer a need to struggle with the world so that it does not overwhelm the individual, as it did previously. The very source of temptation that one had to fight and resist has now been sublimated and transformed into a positive force.

This process is similar to the process of Teshuvah (repentance, return) which, when motivated by a passionate love for G-d, has the capacity to transform the sins into virtues.

Two Approaches to Temptation

The two approaches, one of the vow and the other of the nullification of the vow, represent two levels of dealing with the material world: fighting it (known in Chassidic/Aramaic parlance as "*Iskafya*") or transforming it (referred to as "*Ishapcha*"). One cannot transform it, unless one has first successfully suppressed it.

This is actually the difference between the weekdays and the Shabbos. During the week, to withstand the

temptations from the world with which we are engaged, we must muster the energy to suppress our desires. A business person must constantly struggle to resist the temptation to act unethically. Shabbos, however, is a time when the peace, serenity and holiness that prevails, sublimates all of our activities of the preceding week. There is no struggle and need to resist. It is a day when even our material pursuits, such as eating and drinking, become a Mitzvah.

Jacob and Israel

The Jewish people trace ourselves back to the Patriarch Jacob who was late renamed Israel. However, even after the name change we still refer to him as Jacob.

Chassidic thought explains that we, the Jewish people, have to modalities paralleling the names Jacob and Israel.

In the week days when we have to struggle with the material world we are Jacob. Jacob comes from the root, which means "heel." On Shabbos we are the masters of the world and are therefore called Israel, which means mastery over spiritual and physical forces.

Exile and Moshiach

And these two levels also reflect the difference between the days of exile and the Messianic Era. Now, our focus is on

combating the evil within us and suppressing temptation. Now the Jacob identity is more pronounced. However, In the Messianic Age the focus will be on transforming all evil into holiness.

ESSAY TWO

TURNING SHADOWS INTO LIGHT

Life is a vacuous cycle that gets us nowhere unless we connect it with a Mitzvah G-d's will.

G-d does not exist for something else, so too a Mitzvah, which is an expression of His will, does not have to serve some other need.

It is not jut a means to an end; it is an end!

ESSAY TWO

TURNING SHADOWS INTO LIGHT

Another Puzzling Midrash

The opening verses of this week's double parsha, Matos and Masei, discuss the laws of vows and oaths:

"When a person makes a vow to G-d or makes an oath to prohibit himself, he may not violate his word; he must act in accordance with whatever he uttered."

In a genre of Midrashic work entitled Midrash *Peliah*- Puzzling Midrash (a collection of enigmatic statements, almost like riddles, intended to get us to probe more deeply into the subject), there is a cryptic comment concerning vows.

Speaking of the opening phrase of this week's parsha, "When a person makes a vow to G-d" the Midrash comments:

> "This is [the meaning of] what the scripture says, '[For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing,] because our days upon earth are a shadow.' Job (8:9)"

What is the connection between our lives resembling a fleeting shadow and a person making a vow to G-d?

Life is a Shadow

One possible explanation is that when we reflect on our lives we conclude that they lack substance. Time flies, as the expression goes, and before we know it, most of what we have done loses its relevancy. Many individuals have reflected on their lives and decided that there was very little of real, authentic and worth living for merit in their past and what little there was of worth, is now gone. This reflection has brought many a person to feelings of Teshuvah (repentance or return) as a way of salvaging their lives.

In truth, one does not have to wait until life is about over to appreciate its emptiness and ephemeral nature. Even when we are living it, we often recognize that most of what we do in life is not real. Our life's experiences can feel like mere shadows of reality.

The Exceptions

There are notable exceptions to this rule, which can make life worthwhile. These are the things we do that are connected to G-d, the essence of substance and reality. Our connection to G-d is made through the observance of the

Mitzvos-commandments, which represent G-d's will. The uniqueness of G-d's will is that it is at one with G-d. Just like G-d is not here for something else, so too His will is not simply geared to satisfy some other need, as is so often the case with human will. A person wants to work because it will provide him with money. A person wants money so he can purchase food and pay his rent. A person desires to eat and have a place to live so he can be healthy and comfortable, so he can go to work and make money…

Life is a vacuous cycle that gets us nowhere unless we connect it with G-d's will because, when G-d, by contrast, expresses His desire for us to do a Mitzvah, that is the objective. There need not be another objective because G-d and His will are one, and just as He does not exist for something else, so too His will does not have to serve some other need.

Put in simple terms, the only time we deal directly with substantive life experiences is when we connect our actions to G-d through the performance of a Mitzvah. For example, when a Jewish man puts on Tefillin, that experience is G-dly; it is real and endures forever. When a Jewish woman lights Shabbos candles, that light is G-dly light, substantive, and enduring.

The same can be said for the negative commandments. When we resist the temptation to engage in forbidden

thought, speech or action, then our thought, speech and action are not sullied, which renders these functions G-dly and therefore substantive and enduring.

What about the Rest of the Day?

But, what about the rest of the day, when we are engaged in "neutral" behavior? When we are not actually performing a Mitzvah how do we bring meaning and substance into our lives? And since most of our day and night is filled with neutral activities such as work, eating and sleeping, it would suggest that an enormous portion of our lives is devoid of real meaning and substance.

The standard answer to this is that when we behave with the intention of serving G-d then everything we do becomes a vehicle for the Divine and elevates the mundane into the G-dly sphere. This is what our Sages meant with the expression, "All your deeds shall be for the sake of heaven."

However, there are some people would like to have a more direct connection with G-d even when engaged in mundane activities. They are not content with doing things for an eventual G-dly objective. They want to instill their everyday lives with Divine energy even when engaged in non-spiritual matters. In their minds, doing neutral things is like a shadow relative to the blazing light released in the performance of a Mitzvah. So how do you turn a non-Mitzvah into a Mitzvah?

To remedy this situation one makes a vow to G-d to engage or to not engage in a certain activity. Now, he or she is duty-bound by the Torah's commandment to respect that vow. Mundane activity has been transformed into a G-dly act. Remaining faithful to one's vow or oath renders that activity (or the inactivity in case the vow was restrictive) an intrinsic Mitzvah act, which brings substance to areas of one's life which once were outside the pale of the Mitzvah.

This then is the deeper meaning of the cryptic reference to our days on earth as shadows. Without the vows one makes to G-d, most of our activities are reduced to shadows of reality and our lives, in terms of the aggregate of the activities we engage in, are reduced to a mere ephemeral shadow.

However there are conflicting opinions about the propriety of making vows. One Talmudic source discourages vows that impose additional prohibitions on a person that the Torah did not prohibit. Other sources seem to advocate it, as in Ethics of the Fathers: Vows are a fence for abstention.

The difference lies in the motive for the vow. If the vow is intended to imbue the shadowy nature of our existence with meaning and substance then it is desirable. If, on the other hand, the objective of the vow is self-affliction, the Talmud advises against it.

Redemption: Above the Sun

The Zohar cites the foregoing verse from Job which compares our days to shadows as referring to the end of exile and the beginning of the Redemption. According to the Zohar (following the interpretation of the commentary *Ziv HaZohar)*, the first part of the verse "For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing" refers to the last millennium of Galus-exile, while the concluding words, "our days upon earth are a shadow," refers to the last quarter of the sixth millennium (from the year 5750 onward) when the late afternoon sun casts the longest shadows.

What is the relationship of shadows at the onset of the final Redemption with the idea that vows transform our shadows into reality?

The entire concept of making a vow to introduce holiness into our mundane activities is necessitated by the Galus perception of a dichotomy between the holy things we do, such as performance of a mitzvah, and everything else that is neutral.

This distinction, however, is not, in and of itself, real. In truth, from G-d's perspective, the world of shadows is no less G-dly than the world of light. The Galus conditions which keep us from rising above the sun, metaphorically speaking, render everything in this world, other than a Mitzvah, a "Vanity of vanities," as King Solomon stated in

Ecclesiastes. When we live "under the sun," the expression used by Solomon to describe our quotidian existence, there is a distinction between the sunlight and the shadow it casts.

However, when one rises above the sun and sees the world from G-d's vantage point, one sees the shadow as no less significant than the sun that creates it.

In the Messianic Age we will see G-dliness in everything that we do. Even when we engage in the most physical of behaviors it will be a form of serving G-d. This is, in fact, what King Solomon meant when he said in Proverbs, "Know Him in all your ways." However, true knowledge eludes us in of exile. Recall the passage cited above from Job: "For we are but of yesterday, and **know nothing**." Because we are from yesterday, meaning the period of exile, we know nothing. Our ability to truly know G-d and see His presence in everything that we do is limited, hence we resort to vows as a way of introducing holiness into our ordinary activities.

However, in the Messianic Age, the prophet declares, "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the water covers the sea." We will gain this upper ("above the sun") level knowledge and therefore be capable of seeing the Divine in everything. We will no longer need vows to turn our shadows into light.

ESSAY THREE

ANNUL YOUR VOWS

When we realize that our true desire is to be close to G-d by observing His commandments, we free ourselves from the compulsion to compromise.

The wish to compromise is often a result of not being in touch with our true desire.

Being out of touch with that reality, we erroneously think we cannot accept the totality of Torah because it conflicts with our interests.

ESSAY THREE

ANNUL YOUR VOWS

The Power of Speech

The Torah places great emphasis on the words of our mouths. This manifests itself in many ways. Our mouths are to be used to speak and teach words of Torah as we say in the Shema "and you shall speak OF them." The manner of speech is also important. We are not to speak ill of others. We are not to curse. A Kohain is obligated to bless the Jewish people with the three priestly blessings. But nowhere is the extraordinary power of speech more pronounced than in the subject of vows, the subject of the beginning of this week's parsha—Matos.

The parsha begins:

> "Moses spoke to the children of Israel's tribal heads, saying: 'This is what G-d has commanded: When a person makes a vow to G-d or makes an oath to prohibit himself, he may not violate his word; he must act in accordance with whatever he uttered.'"

In other words, if a person makes an oath that he will not eat an apple, he is duty bound to abide by that oath. For that person, to eat an apple is equivalent to eating a piece of pork. We see from this that the Torah has conferred upon us the power to prohibit to ourselves things that the Torah expressly permits. In addition, our self prohibition carries the same weight as those prohibitions that the Torah imposes.

Annulment

There is, however, an important caveat. Whereas a piece of pork can never be permitted (unless, of course, it is a matter of life and death) there is a way for one to nullify his oath.

The Talmud, in transmitting an oral tradition handed to Moses at Sinai and hinted at in the Biblical text, states that a person has a way to renounce and annul that oath. One may present the matter of the oath to a panel of three rabbis. If they elicit a statement from the oath taker that had he or she known the repercussions of the vow, he or she would not have made it in the first place, the rabbis have the power to release the person from the vow.

This power of annulment is the only example in Jewish law where rabbis have any power to change Torah law. But in truth, they are not changing the law; they are merely exercising their G-d given license to annul the vow.

Historically, the Sadducees, a group of heretics who rejected the practices and beliefs of Judaism based on the Oral Torah, did not accept that a panel of rabbis has this power and ability.

Kol Nidrei and Rejecting Heresy

The importance of renouncing vows is underscored in our *Kol Nidrei* prayer, which we recite at the onset of our holiest day, Yom Kippur. This prayer incorporates a legal procedure wherein we annul our vows, either past or future (depending on two different customs).

Much has been written about the reason this legal declaration is made on the most holy day of the year. Wouldn't it have been more appropriate to begin our worship service with the theme of Teshuvah (repentance or return)?

Rabbi Yosef Rosen of Dvinsk (known as the Rogatchover Gaon, one of the greatest Talmudic scholars of the 20th century) offers a novel insight about this choice. He demonstrates that whenever the heretical Sadducees rejected a Jewish ritual based on the Oral Torah, faithful Jews would perform the ritual publically, with much fanfare. Moreover, the "controversial" ceremony usually required the repetition of certain key phrases three times in order to defiantly

declare fidelity to Torah in its entirety—Oral as well as Written.

Thus on Judaism's holiest day we begin by declaring our total and uncompromising commitment to G-d by embracing His Torah in its entirety.

The Negative Side of Compromise

To further clarify the Ragatchover's approach:

One of the challenges in our lives is the struggle between our selfish desires and the dictates of the Torah. There are three possible outcomes: Either we succumb to our selfish interests or we surrender to the Torah's dictates or we try to find a compromise between these two demands. While it would seem that compromise is better than total surrender to the other side, compromise can often create worse problems than an outright capitulation to the wrong side. And this, we might suggest, is the tie-in with Yom Kippur.

When we find a happy medium between what G-d wants and what our Animal Soul desires, we may feel satisfied and complacent. Our conscience no longer bothers us because, in our minds, we followed G-d's Will, at least to some extent. Compromisers will very likely think to themselves that they are now able to have their proverbial cake and eat it too.

During all the other days of the year such a compromise is not necessarily the lowest point to which one can degenerate spiritually. It could be far worse if a person totally rejects following the Torah's dictates. On Yom Kippur, however, compromise and smugness can prove to be a great impediment. Teshuvah constitutes the very essence of Yom Kippur and its prayers. For us to truly regret our past imperfections and resolve to change we must recognize where we have failed. Those people who have chosen to transgress rather than compromise with the Torah's dictates cannot fool themselves into thinking that they are not in need of drastic change. Those who've made a compromise, by contrast, might very well delude themselves into thinking that while they were not perfect (and who is?) they were, more or less, in good spiritual shape.

Thus, when Yom Kippur begins, we annul our vows. It is a procedure based on the Oral Torah. In this way, we affirm our belief in and commitment to the complete Torah: both Written and Oral Torahs. We start the Day of Atonement on the right foot; we are not going to delude ourselves. Instead, we are good and ready for a brutally honest self-evaluation.

Why Annulling Vows?

This explanation, based on the thesis of the Ragatchover Gaon, does not explain why this **particular** ceremony is used to commence the process of Teshuvah on Yom Kippur. If the goal was to initiate Yom Kippur with a ceremony based on the Oral Torah many other such examples could have been used. Why pick annulling vows over all other examples?

The answer lies in understanding the dynamic of annulling a vow. It is based on an understanding of a person's mistaken notion about his or her own choices in life and what is his or her true potential.

In the moment when people make vows to refrain from a certain activity, they are sure that that prohibition is in their best interests. Later on, when they appear before the rabbinic tribunal, they realize that, in fact, it was not in their best interest and had they known the consequences of their vow they would never had made it.

Frequently, we assume that the actions we take are truly consistent with our best interests and they reflect our true desires. The process of Teshuvah, particularly on Yom Kippur, is similar to the annulment process. It makes us realize that what we thought was what we wanted was not truly our real desire. Suppose a child wants to drink something harmful. The parent (or in some cases that same

child when he or she matures), will realize that the child's immediate desire was not in his or her true best interest.

Yom Kippur is the day of Teshuvah. It is the day of our maturity; we begin to recognize who we really are and identify our true interests and desires.

This thought ties in to the abovementioned rejection of compromise in our observance of Torah and its Mitzvos. When we realize that our true desire is to be close to G-d by observing His commandments, we free ourselves from the compulsion to compromise. The wish to compromise is often a result of not being in touch with our true desire. Being out of touch with that reality, we erroneously think we cannot accept the totality of Torah because it conflicts with our interests.

Geulah: The Annulment of Galus Vows

Annulment of vows is a rejection of the themes of compromise and a delusional sense of self. The same two erroneous impulses also can be applied to the differences that exist between Galus-exile and Geulah-Redemption.

In Galus we are pulled in both directions but we tend to lean towards our selfish-interests, so compromise is the best solution we think we can reach. This clearly reveals our penchant to compromise in spiritual matters generally. That

settling for less is a direct consequence of a Galus inferiority complex and low spiritual self-esteem. We don't believe that we really want to go all the way and follow the Torah without compromise. We don't give ourselves enough credit to understand that we are fully able to go all the way.

One of the consequences of being self-delusional is that we don't think we have the strength to be uncompromisingly faithful, so we make vows and impose unnecessary prohibitions on ourselves. In an ideal world there is no need for these vows. As the Talmud puts it: "That which the Torah prohibits should suffice for you." The same inferiority complex and lack of self-respect that keeps a person from shooting for perfection motivates the same person to make unnecessary vows.

Geulah is when all of our needless vows, born from a lack of appreciation for who we are and the resources we possess, will be annulled. We will not need to use vows as crutches to support us in the struggle with our egos and self-centered nature. We will also lose any desire we may have to perform the Mitzvos in a compromised fashion. Maimonides explains that Moshiach's objective will be to make Torah observance complete. We will comprehend our real desire and powerful potential. We will embrace Torah in its entirety.

ESSAY FOUR

VOWS AND TONGS IN THE TWILIGHT ZONE

During the twilight period which bridges the gap between the weekdays and Shabbos, G-d empowers us to make the transition from the "repair the world" mode into an "uplift the world" mode.

It equips us with the tools to raise an already perfected world to an even more sublime level.

ESSAY FOUR

VOWS AND TONGS IN THE TWILIGHT ZONE

"The License for Annulment Hovers in the Air."

The opening of this week's parsha discusses the institution of the *neder*-vow. When one makes a vow to either engage in or desist from a certain behavior, one is duty-bound to keep his or her word. There is, however, a method through which one can have a vow annulled. The person who made the vow comes before a tribunal of three rabbis (or even one professional rabbinic judge) and makes it known to them that if he or she had known the consequences of the vow, he or she would never have made it. The three judges then declare the vow to be "null and void."

Where in the Torah does it provide for annulment of a vow?

If we examine the Biblical text, we cannot find any explicit statement to this effect. It is primarily based on an oral tradition going back to Sinai. However, the Talmud (*Chagigah* 10a) does find several hints in the Torah for the power for annulment. One of them is the following: The

Torah states: "He shall not profane his word." The Talmud observes:

> "**He** (the person who made the vow), may not profane his word, but others can profane it for him."

In other words, while a person cannot personally get out of his commitment, others (a tribunal of three rabbis), are indeed empowered to do it for him.

The fact that the license for vow annulment is merely a hint prompted our Talmudic Sages to state: "The license for annulment **hovers in the air**." This means that there is no solid textual basis for this power. (This was not to suggest that the Rabbis pulled it out of thin air; it just means that it is not **textually** based, rather it derives from an oral tradition, with a mere allusion to it in the Biblical text.)

A Mystifying Midrash

There is a body of Midrash that is enigmatic and sometimes even appears to be incoherent. The objective was to get us to extract a message from it by thinking out of the box.

There is such a Midrashic statement revolving around the above-mentioned license of vow annulment:

The license for annulment of vows floats in the air. From this our Sages in the Mishnah (Avos 5) derived that tongs were made by tongs.

On the surface there is absolutely no connection between these two statements. The statement concerning tongs is that in order to manufacture tongs one must use a set of tongs. Who then made the first set? The answer the Mishnah gives is that G-d created it at the twilight of the seventh day of creation. How does this relate to the law of a rabbinic court annulling vows lacking a solid textual basis to the extent that they appear to just be floating in the air?

Two Modes of Existence and Endeavor

To find the connection between these apparently unrelated themes we must first delve more deeply into the significance of G-d creating a pair of tongs at twilight of the seventh day of creation.

The following is an adaptation of the Rebbe's discourse (*Likkutei Sichos* Volume 17) in which he explains that the tongs created at twilight signify a higher dimension of human endeavor than that which was created in the earlier six days of creation:

When G-d created the world He gave us everything we needed to make the world perfect. Only then did He create Adam and Eve on the sixth day of creation so that everything they needed would be there for them to utilize in making a perfect world. Humanity was created last, the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 38a) states, "so that he may enter immediately

into the banquet." The "banquet" includes all of our efforts at getting the world ready for its final achievement, the Messianic Age, at which time we will no longer suffer from hunger and war, strife and hatred.

However, the Messianic Age is not a time for retirement. On the contrary, we will then embark on a major effort within the realm of goodness and holiness. Since G-d is infinite, so are the degrees to which we can connect to Him. Whereas today the primary focus is on combating evil, removing the ills of society by teaching the ignorant, feeding the hungry, assisting the poor etc., in the Messianic Age we will be transforming *everything*, including the positive, to an even higher level of closeness to an infinite G-d. Whereas today the world is divided into good, evil and neutral, in the Messianic Age, everything will be good and the challenge will be to climb even higher.

This explains the difference between the things G-d created before and after Adam and Eve. The things that were created prior to Adam and Eve's arrival are the raw material which humanity was charged with the responsibility to correct and perfect. They also serve as the tools needed to achieve that correction. Conversely, those things created after Adam and Eve (including the first set of tongs created at twilight of the seventh day) have a higher function. These unique creations serve as a bridge between the imperfect world of nature and the world that transcends nature and its need for repair and

correction. These are the tools which enable us to grow within the already perfected world of the Messianic Age.

We get a taste of this higher mode of perfecting the world every Shabbos, when even the most mundane activities, such as eating, are holy and suffused with Divine delight, and we divorce ourselves from all the negativity of the outside environment.

During this twilight period, which bridges the gap between the weekdays and Shabbos, G-d empowers us to make the transition from the "repair the world" mode into an "uplift the world" mode, equipping us then with the tools to raise an already perfected world to an even more sublime level.

No More Hierarchy

We can now understand the meaning of G-d creating tongs for the purpose of making tongs at twilight of Shabbos. In the pre-Messianic mode of healing and repairing an imperfect world, there is a hierarchy of actions in terms of their proximity to the goal. We must distinguish between the actions that deal directly with the goal and those that are tangential or mere accessories.

To illustrate: When we devote most of our day to earn a living, it is only an accessory to the Mitzvah of giving charity from 10 or 20 percent of one's income. By contrast, the act of

giving tzedakah itself is an intrinsically holy act. Indeed, most of our lives are spent in the world of accessories to meeting our goal. Only a small percentage of our time is directly and intrinsically holy.

This is what is meant, metaphorically speaking, of tongs. They are instruments and accessories with which one constructs the edifice, but they are by no means as significant as the resultant structure.

However, in a perfected world, even the tongs (read: mundane activities that were heretofore only remotely connected to the goal) become an inseparable and intimate part of the goal. They are not just a means to an end; they are part of the end.

Thus, the Rebbe explains, the tongs that were created by G-d at twilight for the purpose of making other sets of tongs alludes to a futuristic mode in which every aspect of our lives cease to be mere accessories to holiness. They all become intrinsically sublime and G-dly.

The Connection

We can now understand the connection between the creation of the tongs in the twilight zone and the idea that the power of annulment of vows hovers in the air.

The two modes discussed above concerning the macro world (repairing an imperfect world and elevating a perfected world) parallel the two modes of a vow and vow annulment within the micro world.

A vow is a support for our inability to cope with the challenges posed by living in an imperfect world. When a person is tempted to engage in a forbidden activity, he or she will make a vow to restrict him or herself. The vow draws upon the Divine energy vested within creation that can lend support to a person who is vulnerable and in need of repair.

But annulment of a vow derives from an even higher and more sublime Divine force; a force that "hovers in the air." This is intended for those who are no longer in the clutches of negativity (particularly the negativity of the time of exile which is a time of Divine concealment) and who have crossed into the pre-Messianic "twilight zone." They no longer need the additional support from the vow and are able to engage in the process of connecting to G-d directly in all that they do. They are now connected to the "air of Moshiach." They have traveled outside the stifling, polluted atmosphere and gravitational pull of the earth. They can now soar above the stratosphere and travel at record speeds in the "weightless" and infinite expanse of "outer space."

Hence, the idea that annulment of vows "hovers in the air" implies that one rises above the constraints of the earth and its imperfections and plugs into a Messianic dynamic. Likewise, the creation of the tongs at twilight of Shabbos implies the creation of an instrument that is no longer needed for repair but for higher and higher elevations.

Living with Moshiach

We are presently living in the twilight of creation; standing on the threshold between the six millennia of existence and the seventh millennium, the Shabbos of existence. Moshiach is in the air! And while we still have much in the world that needs repair, the Rebbe informed us that when we view the cumulative good of millennia, the world has already achieved its "quota" of refinement necessary for Moshiach to come. So while we must not neglect to correct the negatives, our focus should be on rising to higher and higher levels of spirituality, by making all of our activities, even the so-called "accessories-tongs," into G-dly activities. This is likely what the Rebbe had in mind when he said that we should now "live with Moshiach."

ESSAY FIVE

PURGING OUR UTENSILS

Moses' devotion to his people was so great that he was willing to sacrifice his own spiritual standing, by virtue of his anger, to teach them important lessons and to help rehabilitate them.

The faithful leader of the Jewish people was willing to degrade himself for their sake. And indeed, his anger had consequences. He erred.

Thus, instead of seeing Moses' anger as a sign of his weakness and "humanity" we should see it as a manifestation of Moses' self-sacrifice for the well-being of his people.

ESSAY FIVE

PURGING OUR UTENSILS

"Koshering Utensils"

This week's parsha describes the war the Jewish nation was commanded to fight against Midian before entering into the Promised Land.

Midian was the nation that sent its women to seduce the Jewish men and ultimately got them to worship their idols. G-d's wrath was kindled against them, as the Torah puts it, and commands Moses—before he was to pass on—to wage war against them.

Upon their return from the battlefield, Moses realized that they had not properly carried out his orders, and was enraged. He then instructed those who were involved in the killing to be separated from the camp for a period of seven days, during which time they would undergo ritual purification.

After Moses' instruction to them, Moses' nephew Elazar proceeded to instruct them as to the laws of purging the utensils that were captured from the Midianites and had

absorbed non-kosher substances. Utensils that were used in fire must be purged with fire. These laws form the basis of the "koshering" method to render non-kosher utensils usable that are routinely used to this day.

Why Elazar?

Rashi, anticipating the obvious question as to why Elazar instructed them and not Moses, explains that Moses' display of anger caused him to forget the laws concerning the purging of utensils. Rashi then cites two other examples of Moses erring as a result of his anger.

Before we explore the significance of the specific law that Moses forgot as a result of his anger, it is important for us to understand how it is that Moses the greatest of all people that ever lived, the person closest to G-d and perfection, should be brought to anger. Anger, our Sages tell us, is one of the worst traits that one must distance oneself from. It is compared to idol worship. How could the most perfect of all humans sinned so grievously?

We must conclude that Moses justified his anger at the Jewish nation for their repeated lapses. In Moses mind, his anger was intended to make the people realize how they have strayed and correct their errant ways. Moses knew that his anger would cause him some harm because even justifiable anger is harmful to the person who gets angry.

Moses' Sacrifice

Moses' devotion to his people was so great that he was willing to sacrifice his own spiritual standing, by virtue of his anger, to teach them important lessons and to help rehabilitate them. The faithful leader of the Jewish people was willing to degrade himself for their sake. And indeed, his anger had consequences. He erred.

Thus, instead of seeing Moses' anger as a sign of his weakness and "humanity" we should see it as a manifestation of Moses' self-sacrifice for the well-being of his people.

Why did He Forget *this* Law?

Having explained the rationale for Moses' anger we can now reflect on the specific law that Moses forgot: the law of purging utensils. As stated, this law relates to utensils that were used by non-Jews that absorbed non-kosher food. The Torah relates that non-kosher utensils can be purged of the noxious substances that they have absorbed by way of fire.

We may ask, why was it that of all the laws that Moses could have forgotten as a result of his anger, it was this law in particular that he forgot? Is there anything that connects this law with the anger he exhibited towards the people?

Purging Negative Traits

Every law of the Torah expresses truths that can be applied to each and every person. The idea of purging an inanimate utensil can serve as a lesson for us as well. This law, when applied to human behavior and character, demonstrates how it is possible to get rid of unwanted traits that contaminate our personalities. A person should not think that they are forever locked into their personalities. A person can change as long as they are willing to unleash the fiery passion of their G-dly soul that has the power to reshape one's personality.

Moses' anger was a result of the high expectations he had for the Jewish people. When they did not live up to his expectations he got angry thinking that they were incapable of changing their behaviors otherwise. They were doomed to repeat the same mistakes. In Moses' mind, there was no alternative but to chastise them with his anger, come what may.

Thus the result of Moses' anger was his forgetting the laws of purging undesirable matter from utensils. This was G-d's way of showing him that his anger was misplaced. They were indeed capable of purging their own flaws the same way a contaminated utensil can be decontaminated. They did not need the anger to change; it sufficed for them to uncover their soul's fire and warmth.

Faith in G-d and Faith in the Jewish People

Indeed, one of the other examples of Moses' anger and the resultant error, cited by Rashi, also involved Moses lack of faith in the ability of the people to change and do what was right on their own. Moses got angry when the people demanded water. G-d told him to speak to the rock and it would produce water. Moses got angry and hit the rock instead.

G-d's command to him to speak to the rock rather than strike it was, in addition to its plain meaning, also a metaphor. Moses should have realized that the Jewish nation had come a long way from the time almost forty years earlier when he was told by G-d to actually hit the rock. That was a metaphor for their raw state of mind at the time of the Exodus that could not be changed except by employing a harsh disciplinary approach. G-d ordered him **then** to strike the rock. Only then did it produce the refreshing water that sustained them for almost forty years of their wanderings in the desert.

However, the next generation of Jews did not need to be struck. Talking to them would have sufficed to reveal their inner goodness. G-d therefore commanded Moses to talk to the rock.

It is interesting that according to Maimonides' Moses "sin" in that episode was his anger. According to Rashi it was his disobeying G-d's command to speak to the rock.

In truth, both explanations are complementary. His anger was his way of jolting the people, causing them to soften and allow their fountains of life sustaining water to gush forth. Metaphorically speaking, that was in fact what is meant by striking the rock instead of speaking to it. Moses concluded that they needed tough love and he was prepared to give it.

However, Moses was faulted for not recognizing that there was a radical shift in the state of the Jews from the time of the Exodus to the time that they were ready to enter into the Promised Land. For the new generation it was imperative that they be treated with more love and compassion—the soft approach.

Lesson for Days of Moshiach

The lesson for our generation is obvious:

We are living at the tail end of the period of exile; on the cusp of the Messianic Age. We have come to the end of our wanderings in the "desert of nations." Jews today do not have to be struck. There is no justification to get angry at them in order to change them. As a people, we have been purged of all our negativity because we have been subjected to the

"koshering" process through fire. The figurative and indeed literal fires of the Holocaust and all the other tragedies that engulfed the Jewish people before and after, have cleansed us and has rid us of our evil. Contrary to the popular misconception that prevails in some segments of the Jewish community, we—as a group—are far more refined and holy than our forebears.

Insofar as the **individual** Jew is concerned—who may be lagging behind the communal attainments—it is not necessary for us to use the stick and anger approach to get them on the right path. For even the individual Jew who has absorbed the most spiritually toxic influences can be purged of them without resorting to anger and abuse. All it takes is for us to help them and ourselves is to reveal the passion and fire of their/our souls.

ESSAY SIX

PERPETUAL WAR

Even when we resoundingly defeat our internal enemy, we must be poised to fight yet another battle with evil.

The battle against one's internal evil is continuous.

In the Messianic Age it will be the struggle to climb to greater heights.

ESSAY SIX

PERPETUAL WAR

Grammatical Problems

This week's parsha – Matos – discusses the aftermath of a war waged against the Midianites; a nation that caused the Jewish people to degenerate into gross immorality and idol worship. Elazar the High Priest addresses those who returned from battle concerning the way they had to purge the utensils captured from the Midianites from the non-kosher food substances absorbed in them.

A literal rendition of the introductory verse to the laws concerning the purging of the utensils raises an obvious grammatical question. It says: "Elazar the priest said to the soldiers who were coming "*la'milchama*- **to** the war. Should it not have said: "*mi'milchama*-**from** the war?" It is quite clear that these were the soldiers who were returning from battle as indeed all the translators put it. Yet the Torah makes it sound as if they were going to war.

A second question is the usage of the present tense: "Those who were coming" and not "those who came."

War Not Over!

R. Yisachar Dov of Belz, a Chassidic Master, answers the first question by understanding the war against Midian as a metaphor for the struggle against our own vices, negative drives and impulses. Even when one resoundingly defeats the internal enemy, they must realize that they are poised to fight yet another battle with evil.

This premise also answers the second question as to the usage of the present tense: "those who were coming" and not "those who came." The battle against one's internal Midian (the root of the word means quarrel, alluding to the way we often seek to quarrel with and antagonize G-d and other people), is not just of the past; it is continuous.

This thought echoes the well-known thesis of the Tanya, the principal work of Chabad Chassidic thought. There it explains that the *Benoni*-the Intermediate person wedged between the *Tzadik*-righteous and *Rasha*-evil is one who shares the struggle with evil as the evil-doer and yet succeeds in resisting it just as the righteous person who does not have the struggle in the first place.

However this premise that the struggle with evil is perennial, and that no sooner that we feel we've vanquished our enemy we must go out and fight another battle, is rather disconcerting and depressing. How can we feel that we accomplished something in terms of our personal growth and development if we know that immediately upon our sense of victory we must start to fight all over?

Primary Objective in Life

The Tanya establishes that, on the contrary, the primary objective of life is the struggle and not necessarily the victory. While ultimately in the Messianic Age we will achieve total mastery and victory over evil and all evil will be removed from the face of the earth, nevertheless, the effort and energy we expend now before the Messianic drama unfolds generates the Divine light that makes this world a "dwelling place" for G-d. By inundating the world with the G-dly energy now we make it possible for evil to finally be vanquished and even transformed into goodness.

However, even in the Messianic Age, when evil will cease to exist our struggle will merely change focus. For example, we will not have to resist the temptation to steal another person's property, but we will struggle to not "steal" time and energy from our involvement in one holy project for

another holy project. We will struggle with ourselves not to rest on our laurels but to continuously grow in matters of holiness.

ESSAY SEVEN

BE THERE!

No Jew can rest until all of his or her brothers in sisters anywhere in the world, particularly in Israel, are at peace.

Moreover, we should realize that, insofar as our feelings are concerned, there is no "there" and "here." We are all there spiritually and emotionally.

ESSAY SEVEN

BE THERE!

Moses' Rebuke

This week's parsha records the dialogue of two of the twelve tribes' (Reuvein and Gad) with Moses. They did not want to cross over the Jordan and receive their share of the Promised Land with the other ten tribes. Their request to stay behind and receive their share on the east bank of the Jordan provoked a sharp reaction from Moses:

> "Shall your brothers come to wage war and you shall sit here?"

The simple meaning of this statement is that Moses was rebuking them for expressing a lack of desire to join their brethren in the conquest of the Promised Land. Moses' rebuke expressed his disappointment with their request and considered it to be a sign that they had no feeling for their brethren, or/and that the Promised Land was not very promising for them. Thus Moses said to them: How can you stay here when your brothers are putting their lives on the line to conquer the Land of Israel?

One may ask: Why was Moses so quick to reprimand them for their desire to receive their share on the east bank of the Jordan? If Moses felt that they must join their brethren in the conquest of the Land of Israel, he could have simply stated so: "If you want to receive your share here, you must join your fellow Jews in their battles for the land there." If they had said no to Moses' request, he would then have been justified in getting upset with them. Why get angry prematurely?

Can You be Tranquil when Your Brethren are in Danger?

The answer to this question can be found in light of a novel interpretation of this verse given by Rabbi Yonasan Eibushitz, one of the great Sages of the eighteenth century. Rabbi Yonasan provides us with a somewhat different shade of meaning to this verse, focusing on the Hebrew word *teishvu*, which can be translated as "you shall sit." However, Rabbi Yonasan translates it as "shall you sit here tranquilly?"

Moses, in effect, said to these two Tribes: "Shall your brothers come to wage war and will it be possible for you to feel tranquil and comfortable to remain behind?

Not only was Moses concerned that that they might have entertained the notion of not crossing the Jordan with their brethren, Moses was chagrined that they could and would

feel comfortable in staying behind. From the tone in their voice he detected that they would not have been troubled by the prospect of their brothers dying in battle, while they sit tranquilly in their homes.

By expressing his ire and outrage, Moses endeavored to instill in them the feeling that no Jew could be at peace with himself, if Jews elsewhere are in danger.

No Here and There

We may take this a step further. Moses was concerned that even if they would agree to go along with the other tribes and join them in battle, it would have not sufficed if it would have been a battle "there" as a means to procure their share of the land "here."

In other words, Moses was upset that there was a sense of "here" and "there;" that there were two different communities of Jews, where occasionally one will discharge his legal duty to help the other.

Moses would not have even been content with them saying "we cannot rest until we join our brethren there." Moses wanted them to feel that they were all "there," even when physically they may have been elsewhere.

How can a Jew, Moses wondered, ever feel that he or she is not organically connected to other Jews? And if it is

possible not to feel that unity in times of peace, how could a Jew not be jolted out of his or her reverie in times of crises? How can we feel in any way detached? A Jew must feel that he or she is there.

Moses' message to them is the message to every Jew: Can we feel calm and can we be at peace and live our lives in comfort knowing that our brethren are currently fighting a war of survival in the Holy Land?

Moses' message to them is essentially his message to us as well: No Jew can rest until all of his or her brothers in sisters anywhere in the world, particularly in Israel, are at peace.

Moreover, we should realize that, insofar as our feelings are concerned, there is no "there" and "here." We are all there spiritually and emotionally.

Obviously, the most ideal way of achieving the goal of being there is to be there with one's body and soul. Those who can translate that feeling into the physical dimension, to be there and assist in the effort of our brothers and sisters in defending the Holy Land and its inhabitants, deserve the greatest accolades for doing so.

The rest of us, however, must find other ways of expressing genuine solidarity with them. And this takes many forms: In addition to the obvious financial and moral support we must give, we must also cement our ties with Israel

spiritually by way of increased Torah study, observance of the *Mitzvos* (specifically, Tzedakah, Tefillin and Mezuzah, about which our Sages asserted have the capacity to strengthen and protect the Jewish community everywhere). This has been expressed succinctly by the prophet Isaiah: "Zion will be redeemed with *mishpat* (translated as the directives of the Torah) and its captives shall return with tzedakah."

And, of course, our prayers must be with them, specifically the recitation of Psalms. And of all the prayers, the most basic and comprehensive one is the plea to G-d to bring Moshiach to usher in the final Redemption that will bring, once and for all times, true peace, at which time the sense of solidarity and unity will become natural

ESSAY EIGHT

PEACEFUL ZEALOTRY, OR A ZEALOUS PEACE?

A time will come when Pinchas will shed his zealous—albeit, for the sake of peace—veneer, and assume the role of the peacemaker Elijah, and will usher in the ultimate age of unmitigated peace and goodness—the Messianic Age.

ESSAY EIGHT

PEACEFUL ZEALOTRY, OR A ZEALOUS PEACE?

Pinchas' Career

In last week's parsha we read of how G-d praised Pinchas for his zealous response to the outbreak of immorality incited by the daughters of Midian. It was also recorded there that G-d asked Moses and the Jewish nation to wage war against the Midianite nation for their desire to destroy the soul of the fledgling Jewish people.

But Pinchas' involvement in the campaign against the Midianites did not end with his attack against the Midianite princess Cozbi. In this week's parsha, the Torah recounts how Moses appointed him to accompany the army in its military campaign against Midian. Indeed, this set a precedent for all future wars in which a special Kohain (priest) would be anointed to lead the Israelites in war.

Why Pinchas?

Why was there a need to have a priest accompany the military force? And why was Pinchas chosen and not his father, Elazar, who was the High Priest?

Rashi explains that it was Pinchas who slew the Midianite princess, Cozbi, who consorted with the Israelite prince, Zimri. And since he was the one to begin the campaign against those who sought to destroy the Jews, it was his responsibility to complete it.

Rashi also provides a second explanation. Pinchas was avenging the Midianites who sold his maternal grandfather Joseph to the Egyptians. According to Kli Yakar, by selling Joseph to Egypt, the most morally bereft society at that time, their intention was to strip Joseph of whatever dignity he might have retained as a slave in a foreign land. If they succeeded in "contaminating" Joseph, there would never have been a Jewish nation. Hence, Pinchas the grandson of Joseph was especially sensitive to the attempts at breaking the walls of immorality by the Midianites in his generation. He was therefore chosen to lead the charge against them.

War and a Man of Kindness Paradox

One could offer a third explanation:

While most ancient cultures glorified war, Judaism always eschewed it.

While the greatness of most nations was measured by their military exploits, Judaism viewed its own greatness by its obsession with truth, righteousness and peace.

Yet, the Jewish people were "forced" into fighting wars. In order to guarantee that the drive for war and conquest would not become engrained into the psyche of the Jewish people, the Torah required that a Kohain preside over the war. A Kohain is Biblically identified as a man of kindness. A Kohain is one whose entire life is dedicated to the cause of peace; peace between G-d and His people, peace between people, and peace between husband and wife.

There was, however, one drawback to having a Kohain be involved in a war situation. By thrusting a man of peace and kindness into conflict two undesirable situations can ensue.

First, the harsh realities of war may be too much for the gentle and naïve Kohain. He can become overwhelmed in this environment, or lose some of his innocence.

Second, because the Kohain is essentially a man of peace, his presence can possibly get in the way of fighting the war. There is a story of a group of Jewish marksmen who refused to shoot at the enemy because,. As they said, "there were people in the way..." For war to be waged successfully,

it requires a temporary suspension of our normal emotions that inspire us to abhor violence and conflict. A man whose life's work is the pursuit of peace can actually get in the way of winning a war.

So, on one hand, we must have a man of peace involved in the prosecution of war so that we do not acquire a warrior mentality. On the other hand, a "peacenik"-Kohain's influence can compromise the attitude needed for fighting a war.

The Pinchas Synthesis

The Torah therefore exhorted the Jewish people to appoint a special Kohain, one like Pinchas, who combined the two opposite traits of zealousness and peace. Pinchas was not hesitant to use violence, but his motivation was peace.

If the Kohain Gadol, the High Priest would have gotten involved in the execution of the war, there was a danger that either his purity or kindness would be sullied or that the war effort would be compromised. Therefore a Kohain was chosen who was able to temporarily embody these two traits, without one diminishing the other.

Name Change

The Zohar states that "Pinchas is Elijah." And Elijah is the prophet who will announce the arrival of Moshiach and usher in the Messianic Age.

The question can be raised. If Pinchas and Elijah are one and the same, why did his name change?

Perhaps the message conveyed by this name change is that though there is a need for a "peaceful zealotry,"—i.e., zealotry fueled by a desire for real peace—response to the evil forces in our world, represented by Pinchas, it is important that we do not institutionalize this combination.

A time will come when Pinchas will shed his zealous—albeit, for the sake of peace—veneer, and assume the role of the peacemaker Elijah, and will usher in the ultimate age of unmitigated peace and goodness—the Messianic Age.

ESSAY NINE

PURGED BY FIRE AND WATER

Life is a constant struggle.

We are always fighting a war against one obstacle or another.

In the process of fighting against our enemy we may occasionally appropriate the "utensils" or instruments of our enemy. We may possibly absorb certain customs and mores that were never a part of our own culture.

The Torah instructs us to purge ourselves from these unwarranted influences.

ESSAY NINE

PURGED BY FIRE AND WATER

Fighting Water with Water and Fire with Fire

In this week's double parsha, *Matos-Masei*, the story of the war the Jews waged against *Midian* is described, In the aftermath of the war, Elazar, the High Priest, taught the Jewish people how they should *kasher*-purge the utensils that they captured from the Midianites. This narrative actually serves as the basis for the laws of how to take a non-kosher utensil and make it kosher.

The basic rule presented here is that any utensil that was used to cook its contents with water must be purged by using water. The logic behind this is that when one cooks a non-kosher product in a pot, that pot will absorb some of the taste of the non-kosher product. The way we can get the pot to expel its absorbed taste is by boiling water in that pot. This boiling process has the capacity to reverse the process of absorption.

If, however, the pot that was used to cook the non-kosher food used only fire—such as a baking pan—one must use

fire to remove the absorption of non-kosher taste in the pot.

These laws, the Torah states were taught not by Moses, but by his nephew, Elazar. According to Rashi this was because Moses had gotten angry at the Jews when they failed to follow his instructions. As a result he forgot these laws and it was Elazar who was compelled to teach them.

It is intriguing that of all the laws of the Torah, Moses did not teach the laws of koshering utensils. What significance can be attached to this fact?

Two Forms of Impurity

Every law mentioned in the Torah can be applied to everyday experiences of life. What is the significance of purging the impurities absorbed in a utensil by water and by fire?

Life is a constant struggle. We are always fighting a war against one obstacle or another. In the process of fighting against our enemy we may occasionally appropriate the "utensils" or instruments of our enemy. We may possibly absorb certain customs and mores that were never a part of our own culture. But such is the character of an engagement with a foe. In the terminology of the Chassidic classic Tanya: "One who wrestles with a dirty person, also

accumulates some of the dirt." In this context, the Torah instructs us to purge ourselves from these unwarranted influences.

Moses, therefore, was not chosen to be the one to transmit these instructions, because Moses' level of holiness was so high that he was beyond being affected by any involvement with the lowly world. Moses fought against Pharaoh—indeed, he grew up in Pharaoh's palace—and was never affected by it.

Moses: A Soul from Atzilus

In the terminology of Kabbalah: Moses' soul descended from on high, without having to go through the transformative process of descent from the highest spiritual realm (known in Kabbalah as the world of *Atzilus*-emanation) down to the lowest level, to our material world. Moses' soul—as it was in its original pristine form—entered into his physical body. Moses thus could not be affected by engaging in battle with the world, because even "down here" he was truly "up there." He was never a part of this world but always a part of a higher world. G-d thus orchestrated it that he would "forget" these laws and have Elazar reveal them instead.

Returning to the laws of purging the absorbed non-kosher substances in one's utensils.

There are two levels of absorption: First when we confront a foreign culture, we might develop a sense of coldness and indifference to our own culture. Emblematic of this phenomenon was the way Jews who came to this country found it distasteful to dress in the traditional Jewish manner that was the norm in the Shtetel.

Conversely, there are those who go further and actually develop a passion-fire for ways that are alien and even hostile to Jewish values.

Both forms of absorption can be purged. One must use coldness and indifference to foreign values to expel the coldness and indifference to Judaism that one picks up in the process of engagement with foreign cultures. Similarly, one must use fiery passion for Jewish ideals to purge oneself from the misplaced fire and ardor some have for the wrong ideals.

In Jewish law we are taught that while the method of purging through boiling water does not work for utensils that use only fire, the converse is not true. One may use fire to kosher any utensil even the one that was used water to absorb the forbidden taste and substance.

Playing with Fire to Bring Moshiach

As we stand now poised to enter into the era about which

the prophet predicts that all the impurities will be purged from the world, we should reflect on what the most useful method we ought to employ in this direction.

Rather than having to use both "water" and "fire," we should focus all of our energies on setting our souls on fire; by instilling all of our Jewish efforts with fiery enthusiasm, known in Hebrew and in Chassidic parlance as *hislahavus.* With this approach we can kill two birds with one stone as the saying goes. We get rid of the icy indifference and hostility to Judaism while we simultaneously get rid of the misplaced passion for the wrong things as well.

This fire that bursts forth from the core of our soul has the capacity to burn down the final remnants of the wall that separates us from a world of total goodness.

ESSAY TEN

SYNCHRONIZATION

While we are standing on the threshold of the Final Redemption we are not yet living in a perfect world.

Frequently the spiritual and physical realms are not in sync with one another. A beautiful soul can be housed in a unattractive body and vice versa.

The Beis Hamikdash, the Holy Temple, was an exception to this rule. It was G-d's model of a perfect world in which the physical reflects the spiritual beauty and the spiritual beauty is manifested in the physical.

The Beis Hamikdash was a model of how things will ultimately be in the future when all imperfection will be removed from the earth.

ESSAY TEN
SYNCHRONIZATION

Stay With Moshe

The Jewish people had just fought their final battle in the desert against Midian, and they were now poised to enter into, conquer, and settle the Promised Land on the other side of the Jordan River. The Torah, in this week's parsha, recounts how the members of the tribe of Gad and Re'uvain "saw the land of Ya'azer and the land of Gilad, and it was clearly a suitable place for livestock." They then proceeded to request of Moses to stay behind on the east bank of the Jordan. Moses initially was extremely upset about their refusal to cross the Jordan with their brethren. However when they consented to first join their brethren in the conquest of the Land of Cana'an, Moses relented in his opposition to their plan to receive their share of the land on the east bank of the Jordan.

One wonders how the members of these two tribes could forgo the greatness of the land of Israel for a mere material benefit.

According to the Midrash, the Gadites knew that Moses would be buried in the east bank of the Jordan. They felt so close to him that they did not want to part from his place of burial.

The obvious question here is: how do we reconcile this explanation with the one stated explicitly in the Torah that they cared about providing their livestock with the best pasture? And why would they not believe that the Land of Milk and Honey would also be a most suitable place for their livestock?

Moses the Conduit

The answer to these questions lies in the way they viewed Moses' role in providing the Jewish people with their material needs. Our Sages tell us that the Manna that fed the Jewish nation in the desert was in the merit of Moses. Moses thus was to them the conduit of sustenance. To be separated from Moses, in their minds, was to deny themselves the ultimate in material blessings. No matter how plentiful and rich the Land of Israel was, the land in which Moses was buried would be the source of even greater blessing.

Thus the enticement of superior grazing land and the desire to be close to Moses' resting place were not mutually exclusive considerations. In fact they actually complemented

each other. Being close to Moses was the reason the land would be ideal for grazing.

Moses' Rebuke

This explanation, however, invites another question:

If they were indeed so close to Moses that they did not want to part from his burial place, why was Moses initially so harsh on them? Moses rebuked them for following in the path of their evil parents' generation who did not want to go into the Promised Land. It wasn't that they did not love the land of Israel; it was that they loved Moses. and they wanted to be close to him. It would seem that their desire to be close to Moses' resting place was no less a noble and holy desire than the desire to live in the Land of Israel. While Israel is the geographic nerve center of the world, Moses was the human nerve center of the Jewish people. Logically the latter would appear to take precedence over the former. What can be so wrong for them to want to forgo the privilege of living in Israel proper in order to be in close proximity to Moses?

A great rabbi—a follower of the Previous Rebbe (whose Holiday of Liberation from Soviet incarceration, as well as his birthday, is celebrated this week on the 12th day of Tammuz)— declared in his will that he had two passions: one was the Land of Israel and the other was his Rebbe. If there was a quandary for him as to where he should be

buried in the end he decided that he wanted to be buried near his Rebbe in the U.S. notwithstanding his passion for the Land of Israel.

The difficulty with understanding why their decision was not regarded as ideal is magnified when we consider the Midrashic tradition that these tribes (of Gad and Re'uvain) who were the first to get settled in their territory were also the first to be exiled. It is cited by the Midrash as an example of how hasty and impulsive efforts to get something prematurely can prove to be its undoing.

The question is: If, as the Midrash asserts, the Gadites were so consumed by a love for their Rebbe, Moses, why did they deserve to be exiled first?

Two Dimensions of Closeness

One can resolve all these difficulties by understanding the concept of closeness. There are two forms of closeness. The first is physical proximity and the second is spiritual affinity. In an ideal world the two go together. Physical proximity can help to remind us of the love we have for someone. It can also arouse the passion, enhance the love and affection. Conversely, when the spiritual attachment is so powerful it will manifest itself on every level including the physical level.

However we are not yet living in a perfect world. Frequently the spiritual and physical realms are not in sync with one another. A beautiful soul can be housed in a unattractive body. The Talmud relates an incident in which a princess challenged the Talmudic Sage Rabbi Yehoshua: "How such a beautiful mind can be housed in such an ugly body?" He responded with the analogy of aged wine that is stored in earthenware and not in silver or golden vessels.

The Beis Hamikdash, the Holy Temple, was an exception to this rule. There is a Biblical requirement that the Kohanim/Priests had to wear dignified and beautiful garments. The Temple was G-d's model of a perfect world in which the physical reflects the spiritual beauty and the spiritual beauty is manifested in the physical. In addition, the Kohain had to be without physical blemishes. It was not because a physically blemished person is in any way inferior to others, G-d forbid. Rather it is because the Beit Hamikdash was a model of how things will ultimately be in the future when all imperfection will be removed from the earth.

Too often we make peace with our limitations. We have become so stoic that it seems that we can tolerate almost any pain and find rationalizations for it. Because of our exposure to so much inconsistency between what we imagine is the ideal and what is the reality it has become difficult for some to believe or expect that a time will come

when adversity will cease. By having one place on earth where a model of perfection existed, it instilled within us a vision of perfection and how G-d envisions the future ultimate reality of the world. The Beit Hamikdash, among other functions, served to whet our appetite for the time when the entire world will become a Sanctuary of G-dly perfection.

Having Our Cake and Eating it

Since we are not yet living in a perfect world we cannot always have both: close physical proximity with the object of our passion and a spiritual connection to that person. In the less than perfect world that we inhabit—until the imminent Redemption—we cannot have our proverbial cake and eat it too. We must choose between the greater of two desirable situations.

We can now gain some insight into the dilemma the Gadites faced. On the one hand, the Jewish people were commanded by G-d to enter into the Promised Land. That was their mission for which their souls were chosen. In an ideal world they would have been able to enjoy close proximity to Moses as well as fulfilling their Divine mission because in an ideal world Moses would have not died in the desert and, instead, would have led all the Jewish people into Israel. In that

scenario, their connection to Moses would have continued on all levels. But alas that was not to be.

Now that they had to choose between these two options: to either be close to Moses or fulfill their spiritual destiny; they chose the former. As noble and admirable as their desire was to be close to their beloved leader, their primary mission at the time was to go into the Promised Land and prepare it for the time when the world would become a perfect world.

Arguably if the entire Jewish nation would have entered the Land—and no tribe would have been left behind—their relationship with the land would have been ideal. The holiness that could have been generated by the totality of the Jewish people occupying the totality of the Holy Land could have sent tsunami forces of holiness to the entire world. And that would have resulted in there not being an exile.

That was then. Now that we stand on the very threshold of the future Redemption we must prepare ourselves for the time when the dream of the Gadites to be close to Moses in both the physical and spiritual sense will come true. Indeed, the Midrash tells us that Moses will arise and bring his people—those who remained on the east bank of the Jordan—and march with them into the Promised Land. We will then see a world that will reflect G-dly perfection.

ESSAY ELEVEN

MAKE ISRAEL HERE!

A certain Chasid went to his Rebbe, known as the Tzemach Tzedek (the third Rebbe of Chabad) seeking permission to move to Israel.

The Rebbe's response was: "Make Israel here."

Despite the fact that we pray daily for the day that all the Jews in the Diaspora will return to Israel under the guidance of Moshiach, our mission now is to transform our own environment in the Diaspora into the spiritual "state" of Israel.

ESSAY ELEVEN

MAKE ISRAEL HERE!

Double Stipulation

The Jewish nation is poised to enter the Promised Land after so many obstacles and delays. And now a new monkey-wrench is thrown into the mix. The two tribes of Re'uvein and Gad want to stay behind and receive their portion of the land on the east side of the Jordan River.

Moses is very upset and rebukes them for appropriating the errant ways of their fathers who refused to enter the Promised Land. It seemed that the new generation had not learned a lesson from the past.

The two tribes respond that they never intended to remain behind while their brethren would be fighting the battles of conquest. Rather, they were prepared to go into the Promised Land and fight alongside the other tribes. Only after the land would be successfully conquered and settled would they return to the east bank of the Jordan and receive their share of the land there.

Moses then "ratifies" their proposal in the following manner:

"If you do this thing, if you arm yourselves for battle before G-d, and your army crosses the Jordan before G-d—then afterwards you may return. You will be free to G-d and Israel, and this land will become your inheritance before G-d."

Moses is not satisfied with his clear directive to them and rephrases the same message in the negative:

> "But, if you do not do so, then you will have sinned against G-d, and you should know that your sin will find you."

Moses reiterates this message to Elazar, the High Priest and all the other Jewish leaders:

> "If the descendants of Gad and Re'uvain cross the Jordan with you before G-d, and the Land is conquered before you, give them the land of Gilad as an inheritance. But, if they do not cross over with you armed, they will receive an inheritance with you in the Land of Cana'an."

The fact that Moses stated his condition for them in both the affirmative ("If you do this thing…") and in the negative ("But, if you do not do so…") serves as the basis of a Talmudic law concerning conditions attached to all transactions and agreements.

For example, if someone were to stipulate, "I am selling you this house on the condition that you travel with me on this day," the condition would not be binding unless it was followed by the negative statement: "If you don't travel with me on this day, the sale shall be null and void."

What is the spiritual meaning of the need for phrasing a condition in both the positive and negative forms? And why did the Torah choose to teach this law with regard to the conquest of Israel?

Extending Israel

A certain Chasid went to his Rebbe, known as the Tzemach Tzedek (the third Rebbe of Chabad) seeking permission to move to Israel. The Rebbe's response was: "Make Israel here." Despite the fact that we pray daily for the day that all the Jews in the Diaspora will return to Israel under the guidance of Moshiach, our mission now is to transform our own environment in the Diaspora into the spiritual "state" of Israel. Conquest of Israel implies that we harness our material resources in the service of G-d and transform our environment into one that is conducive to the performance of the Mitzvos.

This is perhaps what the two tribes of Gad and Re'uvain wished to achieve by settling the east bank of the Jordan, implying that they wanted to take the area that is outside of

Israel proper and make that an extension of Israel. They were not content with G-d's presence revealed in the Land of Israel; they wanted to extend it beyond its borders. Their goal was to ultimately enable G-d's presence to extend even to the farthest reaches of the world.

Initially, Moses was not happy with their proposal. Moses was concerned that they were trying to evade participating in the conquest. Perhaps, Moses thought, these two tribes believed that one need not be connected to the paradoxical concept of a Holy Land; a land that synthesizes the idea of detachment from the physical land (the definition of "holy") within the framework of a physical land.

The words of the Tzemach Tzedek to the chasid to "make Israel here," were not intended to extinguish the chasid's passion for the Land of Israel. On the contrary, it was meant to take the ideal of the Land of Israel and extend it to his own turf. Moreover, making our own environment an extension of Israel is a stepping stone to getting there.

In truth, these two tribes were passionate about Israel. They were even interested in extending the concept of transforming the "land" into "Israel" to the land that was not Israel proper.

We can now understand why Moses had to stipulate with them that if they would not join their brethren they would not get their share in the east bank of the Jordan.

If Moses would have simply stated that if they would join their brethren in the conquest of Israel they would be allowed to inherit their share on the other side of the Jordan, it would have implied that all Moses wanted from them was for them to assist their co-religionists. It would not have been fair for all the other tribes to engage in battle while these two tribes sat at home in comfort.

By stating the negative as well—that if they would fail to join the other tribes in the conquest of Israel they would not inherit the east bank of the Jordan—Moses was, in effect, saying that there is no way we can live in the Diaspora if we are not committed to the ideal of conquest; of transforming the physical land into a Holy Land.

In other words, the positive statement was intended to inform them that it would be unbecoming of them to let their brothers fight for the land while they remained safe and secure in their own territory.

By adding the negative, Moses was stating that if they would not cross the Jordan with their brothers it would be impossible for them to remain in their own homes outside of Israel. We cannot survive as a Jew in the Diaspora if we are not committed to the spiritual idea of "conquest."

This is the legal basis for a contract requiring both the positive and the negative. The positive part of the contract—"I'm selling you my house on the condition that

you travel with me"—establishes that the seller wants good faith on the part of the buyer. The additional, negative clause—"But, if not, I am not willing to sell the property"—is intended to say that if the condition is not met, there can be no sale. In the former statement, the seller merely intimates displeasure if the buyer fails to meet the sellers condition. In the latter, he plainly states that, in that circumstance, the sale would be null and void.

In the same way, Moses was enunciating this double stipulation to the two tribes of Gad and Re'uvain. Moses was expressing displeasure with them for not shouldering the responsibility of conquest with their brothers. In addition, Moses was also making it clear that there was simply no way that they could hold on to their land if they did not join in the conquest of the Land of Israel proper.

Unconditional Support

The lesson for us in our own mission is to prepare the world for the Messianic Age when, according to our Sages, the holiness of Israel will spread to the entire world. This occurs when we draw upon the ideal of the Holiness of Israel and extend it to every part of the world.

G-d offers us success in our mission to make Israel here when we realize that we must give unconditional support to our brethren in the Land of Israel who ensure the physical

and spiritual integrity of Israel. Doing so expresses our solidarity with the Land of Israel and our brothers and sisters who reside there.

Moreover, supporting the integrity of Israel empowers us to transform our own turf into Israel. This, then, becomes the force that propels us into the final Redemption at which time the entire world will experience the holiness of Israel, even as the sanctity of Jerusalem will spread to the entire Israel, and the Bais Hamikdash will spread to the entire Jerusalem. All of existence will be elevated to a higher level of spiritual sensitivity and awareness.

ESSAY TWELVE

BE VINDICATED!

In the present pre-Final Redemption era the virtues and flaws that are deeply embedded in our soul are surfacing.

Some people whom we thought of as mediocre have achieved phenomenal success in their lives and, conversely, people whom we regarded as great have exhibited uncharacteristically negative behavior and tendencies.

The reason this is happening, the Rebbe explained, is based on the verse in the Book of Daniel that prophesizes that before the Redemption all hidden matters will be revealed.

ESSAY TWELVE

BE VINDICATED!

Arousing Suspicion

One of Judaism's standards of conduct that reflects its ethos can be found in the discussion Moses had with two of the twelve tribes—*Gad* and *Reuvein*—who wished to remain on the east bank of the Jordan River rather than sharing the Land of Canaan with the other ten tribes.

Moses was initially perturbed by their request; that they did not want to join their brethren in the conquest of the land. But, in response to Moses' criticism of their request, they reassured him that their intention was to cross the Jordan with the entire Jewish nation, fight their battles and, then after the other ten tribes would receive their inheritance in the land, return to the east bank of the Jordan.

Moses accepted their proposal and stipulated: "If you do this thing, if you arm yourselves before G-d for the battle, and every armed man among you shall cross the Jordan before G-d, until He drives out His enemies before Him,

and the land shall be conquered before G-d, and then you shall return – then you shall be vindicated from G-d and from Israel, and this land shall be a heritage for you before G-d."

The Mishnah (*Shekalim* 3:2) derives from the words "then you shall be vindicated from G-d and from Israel" that a person should always act in a manner that does not arouse suspicion from others. It is not enough to know that our conscience is clear and that our actions are proper in G-d's eyes. We must also act in such a manner as not to arouse suspicion on the part of human beings. This law has many practical applications discussed in various parts of the Talmud.

Three Explanations

There are differing views as to the rationale for this requirement. Some say that this is akin to the oft cited prohibition of *maris ayin*, which forbids any action that can be misinterpreted and causes people to think that a certain prohibited behavior is actually permissible. This, in turn, is akin to another Biblical commandment not to place a stumbling block before the blind. To cause someone to sin is no less of a crime than causing him or her bodily harm.

Another view claims that the need not to arouse suspicion in the eyes of others is distinct from the *maris ayin.* By

acting in a suspicious manner one causes others to sin by falsely suspecting an innocent person.

The common denominator in both of these explanations is that they reflect concern for the spiritual well-being of other people. In the first approach, it is our concern that the other might erroneously think that a certain prohibited action is permissible and then engage in that forbidden activity. In the latter explanation the damage caused to others is the violation of the law that forbids suspecting an innocent person of wrongdoing.

One may posit a third approach to the imperative of being vindicated in the eyes of both G-d and other humans.

Finding a Tikkun

When a person harbors a suspicion about another—even if he or she is innocent—it is a sign from above that there may be an underlying and subconscious level of impurity in the person's motives.

A story is told of a man who asked the second Lubavitcher Rebbe (Rabbi Dovber, known as the Mitteler Rebbe) for a *tikkun* (a means to achieve purification of a sin) for a sin he had committed. The Rebbe asked him to leave the room and then shuttered himself in his study for a few days,

engaged in heartfelt prayers and profound introspection. Only after that did he offer a *tikkun* to that individual.

The Rebbe later explained his unusual behavior. When a person comes to a Rebbe for a *tikkun*, the Rebbe has to find that sin, albeit in the most subtle form, in his own life, which he works on perfecting. Only then is he empowered to help the other with the perfection of his sin. That individual's sin was so reprehensible that the Rebbe could not find even the most subtle form of that sin in himself. Yet, the mere fact that the person came to the Rebbe for assistance meant that the Rebbe had the need and the ability to help. The Rebbe, therefore, had to engage in introspection to find that imperfection deeply imbedded in his own soul. Only then was he able to help this person with a *tikkun*.

In a similar vein, it may be suggested that when a person's behavior arouses suspicion in others it is a sign that there might be a subtle imperfection in that person's behavior. And it is the imperfection that others feel, which they then exaggerate by imputing even more serious flaws to the actions of that person.

The lesson from this approach is that we must always scrutinize our behavior not only for obvious sins and flaws but even for the subtle nuances that lurk beneath the surface.

Conquest of the Seven Emotional Attributes

The fact that this lesson is derived from the narrative of the Jewish nation poised to conquer and inherit the Land of Israel is a sign that it has a special connection to our ability to conquer the land.

Conquest of the land of Cana'an is referred to in the Torah as the "Land of the Seven Nations." In Chassidic literature, these seven nations are also a metaphor for the seven emotional attributes that we possess. Conquest of the land implies that we must not only refine our actions, but also the emotions that underlie those actions. "Be vindicated from G-d and from Israel, and this land shall be a heritage for you before G-d," suggests that in order to conquer the land we must act in ways that will not engender suspicion of our motives because deep down we will have so refined our characters that our motives will be pure.

There is a parallel to our own day and age.

We, too, stand poised to enter into the Land of Israel with Moshiach at our head. We, too, have to focus on refining our emotions and character so that no one senses any flaws in our motives.

No More Secrets!

However, there is an added dimension to the above in light of the Rebbe's statement that in the present pre-Final Redemption era the virtues and flaws that are deeply embedded in our soul are surfacing. We, therefore discover that some people whom we thought of as mediocre have achieved phenomenal success in their lives and, conversely, people whom we regarded as great have exhibited uncharacteristically negative behavior and tendencies. The reason this is happening, the Rebbe explained, is based on the verse in the Book of Daniel that prophesizes that before the Redemption all hidden matters will be revealed.

There has never been a time in history when so many secrets have been exposed. As we speak, the most classified information of the country's top secret agencies, the NSA and the CIA, are being compromised and exposed to the entire world. Deeply confidential conversations are recorded and exposed.

The good news is that because all the subliminal and subterranean levels of our soul are surfacing, we now have the ability to deal with these flaws and correct/perfect them. We are also beneficiaries of the incredible, latent talents that are surfacing and that we can more easily access and harness.

Conquering the Ten Nations

Chassidic literature cites the promise made by G-d to Abraham, that his descendants will inherit ten lands, not just the original seven. These additional three lands, referred to in the Torah as *Keini, Knizi and Kadmoni,* correspond to the three intellectual faculties we each possess. These three faculties can not be refined in the present period and we must wait for the final Redemption for that to occur. Living in Galus/exile does not provide us with the opportunity and capacity to conquer our minds. Our perspectives are molded and shaped by our environment. Thousands of years of exile have taken their toll and have colored the way we think.

However, as we stand on the very threshold of the Final Redemption, the Rebbe exhorted us to engage the mind in subjects that relate to Moshiach and Redemption. This way, the Rebbe explained, we reshape our way of thinking; we experience a paradigm shift. And this is how we begin the process of conquering, not only the Seven Lands which correspond to our emotions, but also the Three Lands which correspond to the way we think.

Thus, the imperative to "be vindicated" is particularly relevant to us. We must work on refinement of the totality of our being—emotions and intellect—as a preparation for

us to bring about the ultimate Redemption, which will give us the entire inheritance that we were promised.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

AN ARM OR A LEG

We have two choices how to cope with the harsh nature of the earth that will determine the outcome of our struggle:

The poorer choice is to wait until we are jolted into submission to normalcy.

The ideal choice is for us to divorce ourselves from its harshness and negativity by equipping ourselves with the proper attitude towards life and our environment.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

AN ARM OR A LEG

Words of Rebuke

The Children of Israel are finally standing poised to enter the Promised Land after all the hitches that plagued their sojourn in the desert for forty years. And now a new crisis erupts. The two tribes of Gad and Reuven approach Moses and request that they not be given a share of the land on the west bank of the Jordan River with the other ten tribes, but rather in its more verdant east bank.

At first, Moses was extremely upset with this request. Moses admonishes them for their reluctance to cross the Jordan with all of their brethren and accuses them of following in the footsteps of their fathers who refused to go to the Land of Israel, and then reminds them of the tragic consequences of their rebellious behavior.

Clarification

Upon hearing these rather sharp words of rebuke from Moses, they proceeded to clarify their position:

> "We will build sheep enclosures for our livestock and cities for our children. We will then arm ourselves quickly and go ahead of the Children of Israel until we've brought them to their place."

They continued to commit themselves to not return to their territory on the east bank of the Jordan until every Jew receives his share of land on the west side of the Jordan.

When Moses hears their willingness to lead the Jews into battle and not take their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan until every last Jew is finally settled on the west side, Moses accedes to their request and says to them:

> "If you do this thing, if you arm yourselves for battle before G-d, and your army crosses the Jordan before G-d... you will be free to G-d and Israel, and this land will become your heritage before G-d."

Armed or Shoeless?

Ba'al Haturim notes the use of the Hebrew word "*chalutz*" which is translated as "armed" and discovers that there is another totally unrelated usage of this word in a different Biblical context.

When a man dies without children, the Torah requires that his brother marry his widow. If the widow's brother-in-law refuses to marry her the Torah provides for a special

ceremony called "*chalitzah*" that allows her to marry anyone she wants.

This ceremony involves the widow removing a special shoe from her brother-in-law's foot. The Torah concludes: "His name in Israel will be called, 'The household of the one whose shoe was removed.'" Here too, the word "chalutz" is employed as a translation of the word "removed."

What in the world is the connection between the armed Gadites and Reuvenites and the removal of the brother-in-law's shoe? At first glance any association between these two themes is far-fetched!

Ba'al Haturim explains the connection:

The Talmud states that before a soldier would go out to battle in King David's army, he would first write a bill of divorce for his wife. This "get" was motivated by love, for if the soldier dies in battle and they were childless, the widow would not have to go through the chalitzah ceremony with her brother-in-law in order to remarry.

Thus, by employing the same word "chalutz" in both sections of the Torah—here in the narrative of the Gadites and Reuvenites going into battle and in the requirement of the widow to go through the chalitzah ceremony—the Torah is thereby intimating that when Moses sent them into battle they would likewise write these bills of divorce to protect their wives.

Soldiers in King David's Army

There must, however, be a deeper connection between these two very disparate themes that can provide us with some insight into our own battles and struggles.

The Rebbe Rashab—Rabbi Sholom Dovber Schneersohn, the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe—referred to his students, and by extension all Jews, as "soldiers in King David's army." The Rebbe explained that we are all fighting the last battle before entering into the Promised Land of the Messianic Age, ushered in by King David's descendent, the Moshiach.

But before we fight this battle we must first "divorce" ourselves from the limited and stifling influences to which we've wed ourselves. We cannot win the struggle against all the negativity in the world around us without having a clear sense of who we are and what positive resources we possess. We must know that we are the masters of our environment and not the other way around. For if we think that we are hostages to the mindset of society then we cannot possibly change it.

Before we go out and fight the final battle for the supremacy of good over evil, etc., we must be armed (chalutz) with the appropriate spiritual weapons.

Head and Arm in One Fell Swoop

According to the Torah, the Gadite method of killing their enemy was to sever their arms and head with one fell swoop.

In a spiritual sense this has been translated to mean that they employ both action and reason in their pursuit of serving G-d. Action alone doesn't suffice. A Jew must employ and apply his mind to his or her Judaism.

And conversely, one cannot delay doing that which is right until one has a full understanding of the subject. Action in the performance of the *Mitzvos* must precede understanding; but understanding must follow soon afterwards.

Avoiding Removal of the Shoe

Armed with the appropriate weapons we can avoid the painful removal of the shoe that is a part of the chalitzah ritual. The shoe is the object that signifies our connection to the earth upon which we tread.

We have two choices how to cope with the harsh nature of the earth that will determine the outcome of our struggle:

The ideal choice is for us to divorce ourselves from its harshness and negativity by equipping ourselves with the proper attitude towards life and our environment.

Alternatively, if we cannot sever our obsessive, compulsive attachment to worldly perspectives, we then become hostages of the worldly mindsets that can cause spiritual death (a metaphor for losing our footing and slipping in a spiritual vein).

When that occurs, the world itself ultimately "removes the shoe from us." This means that society itself—and the way of life that we feel so attached to that we cannot find it in our hearts to distance ourselves from it—rejects us. This rejection is symbolized by removing the shoe making it hard to feel connected to the ground, and thereby forcing us to reexamine our relationship with the world. And while this method works, it is painful and protracted and by far the inferior of the two approaches that are available to us.

As we wait for Moshiach (the scion of King David) to arrive, we ought to choose the method of Gad and Reuven and arm ourselves with the confidence, conviction and courage to take on the world with positive energy and thereby usher in the Age of Redemption when we will no longer have to fight any wars or battles.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

A JOURNEY WITHOUT AN END

When the Torah lists the 42 journeys from Egypt, they are all characterized as journeys from *Mitzraim*.

Each and every journey that took then further away from the geographic region known as *Mitzraim*, they were simultaneously breaking out of yet another level and layer of confinement and spiritual stagnation.

In the realm of goodness and holiness, staying in one place is undesirable and sometimes even harmful.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

A JOURNEY WITHOUT AN END

42 Journeys: Old News?

The second of the two Torah readings, this *Shabbos* is called *Masei*, the journeys. In the beginning of this Parsha the Torah recounts the 42 journeys of the Jewish people from the time they left Egypt to the time that they were poised to enter the promised Land — the Land of Israel.

When we begin to analyze the significance of the Torah recounting these 42 journeys, the obvious question arises. The Torah is not a history book. As its name implies, Torah is a book of Divine instruction and guidance. What significance is there in recounting the journeys the Jewish people traveled when they left Egypt?

To understand the Torah's message to us, we should examine the terminology employed by the Torah in this matter.

> "These are the journeys of the Children of Israel that left from the Land of Egypt."

The use of the plural "journey**s**" in reference to the exodus

from Egypt implies that it took more than one journey to leave Egypt. This is rather strange, inasmuch as it took only one journey to get out of the land called Egypt. When they left Ramses and arrive in Sukkot, they had already crossed the border and were no longer in Egypt. Had the Torah written "These are the journeys **from** the land of Egypt **to** the land of Israel" it would have made sense. But, now that the Torah writes only of their journeys **from** the the Land of Egypt, it begs for an explanation.

Not Out of Egypt Yet

Chassidic literature abounds with references to the deeper meaning of the word *Mitzraim,* the Hebrew name for Egypt. The root of the word can actually be traced to the word that means "confinement" or "in distress." One can easily understand why the Torah gives this name to Egypt, due to the brutal nature of oppression the Jewish people experienced during their stay there.

But there is more to the name than its connotation of physical oppression. *Mitzraim* also — and perhaps, primarily — implies the stifling of one's spiritual state. Thus, the mere fact that the exodus from Egypt marked the end of slavery and brutal oppression, it did not mean that the Jewish nation were totally out of *Mitzraim*.

Upon their departure from Egypt, the Jewish people were

free. They were no longer slaves in a hostile environment, and they may no longer have carried with them an Egyptian Passport, but by no means were they completely out of the woods. As much as they were out of one aspect — albeit a significant one — of *Mitzraim* — the place that represented the nadir of impurity in the spiritual sense that mirrored the physical degradation — they were still not out of *Mitzraim* in all senses of the word. With every journey further, however, they were able to emerge from one more layer of confinement and constraints.

Thus, when the Torah lists the 42 journeys from Egypt, they are all characterized as journeys from *Mitzraim*. Each and every journey that took then further away from the geographic region known as *Mitzraim*, they were simultaneously breaking out of yet another level and layer of confinement and spiritual stagnation, because in the realm of goodness and holiness, staying in one place is undesirable and sometimes even harmful.

Parallel with Four Exiles

This lesson concerning the need to continually "break" out of *Mitzraim*, coincides with the fact that this week's Parsha concludes the fourth of the Five Books of Moses. Chassidic literature discusses how each of the four books of the Torah corresponds to one of the four exiles that we went through.

This means that each book of the Torah enables us to break out of a different form of exile, until we reach the fifth book, which corresponds to the Redemption.

This is analogous to the four cups of wine that we drink at the seder that correspond to the four expressions of redemption. The fifth cup is said to correspond to the fifth expression that represents our complete return to the Promised Land of Israel.

Concluding the fourth book means that we are now ready to enter into the next and ultimate stage of Redemption.

To facilitate this process of redemption, it is crucial that we realize the lesson of the multiple journeys from Egypt-*Mitzraim*. When we realize that no matter how much we removed ourselves from undesirable situations that are analogous to *Mitzraim*, we must continue to journey out of even subtle forms of constraint, continuously aspiring to greater heights. Until we reach our ultimate but imminent destination — Moshiach and Redemption — we are not out of *Mitzraim*.

The realization that we have to strive for our departure from yet another level that confines, limits and inhibits us, only to realize that we still have to move on, is the way we actually hasten the process of the Redemption.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

AARON'S PASSING

Ahavas Chinam is loving someone not because they are endowed with great spiritual, intellectual or physical talents.

This love is not even engendered by another's positive behavior towards you.

It is love that is based on the fact that the other person is G-d's creation. There does not have to be a reason to justify our love towards another.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

AARON'S PASSING

The Only Date

The only person whose date of passing is mentioned explicitly in the Torah is Aaron (Moses' brother). In this week's Torah portion, Masei, the Torah states that Aaron passed away on first day (Rosh Chodesh) of the fifth month (Menachem Av). It is not a coincidence that the reading of this Torah portion occurs on the *Shabbos* that either precedes or follows his Yahrtzeit (anniversary of passing).

What is the connection between Aaron and the first day of the month of Menachem Av?

Senseless Love

Menachem Av is the month during which the Beis Hamikdash (The Holy Temple) was destroyed. The reason for its destruction the Talmud informs us was due to our own divisiveness. At the time the Temple was destroyed, Sinas Chinam (senseless hatred) was rampant within the

Jewish community. Our sages tell us that the way to undo the destruction of the Temple is by going to the other extreme, Ahavas Chinam.

Ahavas Chinam can best be defined as loving someone not because they are endowed with great spiritual, intellectual or physical talents. This love is not engendered by another's positive behavior towards yourself. It is love that is based on the fact that the other person is G-d's creation. There does not have to be a reason to justify our love towards another.

This is what Aaron's whole life was about. Our sages (Ethics of the Fathers Chapter one) state:

> "Be like the disciples of Aaron who love peace and pursue peace, who love the creatures and draw then near to the Torah."

The Alter Rebbe (the first Rebbe of Chabad) in his classic Tanya observes that the word "creatures" is used rather than "person." This is to teach us that we should direct our love even to one whose sole claim to fame is the fact he or she is G-d's creation, G-d's handiwork.

Irrational or Supra-rational?

Some might counter with the idea that we, as humans, must be rational and everything we do must be based on

logic. How then could we demand that we suspend our logic and love people we find rather loathsome.

There are basically two answers to this question,

The first and foremost is that logic and rationality are extremely important in Judaism. But transcending logic is even greater. After we have mastered rational thought and lived our lives consistent with our knowledge, we are then asked to transcend our own limits to connect to an unfathomable G-d. This approach \is not ant—intellectual and irrational it is supra-rational that contains rationality and that which transcends it.

The second answer relates to our consistency. If we can hate someone senselessly, why is it so difficult to accept the notion that we have to love unconditionally? If we reflected on everything we do, we will discover that as rational as we are, there are things that we do that defy logic. In response to a challenge we might say, "That's who I am!"

Well, if that is who we are, we can certainly state the truth that deep down we are one people and that we must therefore treat the other as a part of us that we embrace unconditionally.

One can add a third rationale for being supra-rational when it comes to loving the other. We are living on the cusp of the Messianic Age when we will be exposed to infinite G-dly energy. We will then all experience this

incredible unity. Let us begin plugging in to that dynamic in these last minutes of exile so that we become the force that brings the Final Redemption and the building of the Third Beis Hamikdash!

By following Aaron's example we create the atmosphere within ourselves and within the world to be receptive to the G-dly revelations that occurred in the Temple. May we see its rebuilding imminently!

ESSAY SIXTEEN

THE SMELL OF JUSTICE

As we approach the final journey into the Messianic Age, we must orient ourselves towards a greater understanding of the needs of others.

We should be able to judge others favorably by giving them the benefit of the doubt.

To cultivate this positive trait, it is crucial that we also cultivate a deeper awareness of G-d in our lives and try to see thing from His broad and multi-dimensional perspective, not from our own myopic and limited outlook.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

THE SMELL OF JUSTICE

Life's 42 Journeys

This week's Parsha delineates the forty-two journeys the Jewish people made from their departure from Egypt until they reached the banks of the Jordan River.

Our Sages have suggested that these forty-two journeys are representative of the journeys each and every one of us makes in his or her own lifetime. The changes that we experience in life and all of life's vicissitudes can be characterized by the forty-two journeys that are described in this week's Parsha.

Similarly, our Sages have suggested that these forty-two journeys represent the journeys the Jewish people have made from the beginning of their history until the end of time.

In every journey, it is important that we have a goal. It is imperative that we know what is the end result of the journey and where are we heading.

The Last Journey: Jordan Jericho

The answer to this question in the context of the forty-two journeys is the very last place the Jews encamped before crossing over into the Promised Land: "The Jericho-Jordan." The very last journey of the Jews in the desert took them to the banks of the Jordan River opposite the city of Jericho.

In rabbinic literature, however, the words "Jordan and Jericho" are said to be an allusion to the special characteristics that are associated with the ultimate Jewish leader, the Moshiach (Messiah). The intimation here is that all of our history will ultimately lead to a period of peace and goodness that will be ushered in by this great Jewish leader-Moshiach. But, we still must understand what is the connection between Moshiach and the Jordan and Jericho?

The prophet Isaiah (Chapter 11) describes one of the attributes of the Moshiach as one who will be imbued with a "sense of smell that is inspired by his reverence for G-d." Based on this verse, the Talmud (Sanhedrin) states that one of the ways to test that an individual who makes the claim to be the Messiah is to see whether he is able to judge by virtue of his sense of smell. (*Morach v'da'in*). When Bar Kochba — the great warrior who rebelled against the Romans and declared himself to be the Messiah after some initial spectacular victories — was tested whether he had the capacity to judge in this manner and failed, the rabbis

realized that he was not the Messiah.

The words "Jordan" and "Jericho" in Hebrew are etymologically related to the two words of judge and smell.

Accordingly, our last journey, the final destination of the Jewish people in their long and arduous history is the Messianic Age that will be ushered in by a Jewish leader whose distinction is that he can judge by his sense of smell, intuitively, without the benefit of witnesses and other forms of evidence.

At this point we may ask what precisely is this power? And what lesson can **we** learn from it?

Olfactory Judgment

When we base our judgment on the testimony of witnesses or other forms of evidence, we only get a two dimensional view of the facts. For now, judges have no other choice and must go by the evidence, as it appears to them. In the words of the Talmud: "A judge can only go by what his eyes see."

However, Moshiach will be endowed with the spiritual power to see things three-dimensionally. He will know, when called upon to judge others, what the entire story is, whether or not there were extenuating circumstances. In short, he will see the entire picture and judge accordingly. Invariably this will mean that he will be able to judge more fairly and

more compassionately.

How does Moshiach achieve this advanced state of "smell"? It is by virtue of his heightened state of awareness of and reverence for G-d that enables him to see things through G-d's prism rather than his own.

As we approach the final journey, "Jordan Jericho," or the Messianic Age, we must orient ourselves towards a greater understanding of the needs of others. We should be able to judge others favorably by giving them the benefit of the doubt. To cultivate this positive trait, it is crucial that we also cultivate a deeper awareness of G-d in our lives and try to see thing from His broad and multi-dimensional perspective, not from our own myopic and limited outlook. At that point, we will have ignited the spark of Moshiach within us that will ultimately lead to the true and complete Redemption with Moshiach at our head.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

MURDER!

The Cities of Refuge afforded the person who had displayed callous disregard for another human life — when his or her negligence caused the untimely death of another — to reflect on his or her crime and to be rehabilitated.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

MURDER!

Cities of Refuge: Threefold Purpose

Murder is one of the most heinous crimes that anyone can commit. So degrading and reprehensible is this crime, that even when it is done unintentionally, but with some degree of negligence, the Torah assigns a most unique form of punishment.

The one who committed the unintentional murder must flee to the specially designated Cities of Refuge. These Cities of Refuge served a three-fold function:

First, to protect him from the wrath of the victim's relatives.

Second, the Cities of Refuge were intended as a punishment. According to the Chinuch, for a person to be banished to one city and lose his or her freedom, was the punishment closest to death.

And third, the City of Refuge afforded the person who had displayed callous disregard for another human life — when his or her negligence caused the untimely death of another — to reflect on his or her crime and to be rehabilitated.

Stays Until the Death of the High Priest

How long does the murderer have to stay in these Cities of Refuge? In this week's Torah portion Masei, the Torah provides us with a rather unusual answer. The murderer must stay in these Cities of Refuge "until the death of the High-Priest."

Our sages raise the obvious question. Why does the length of the murderer's sentence depend on the High Priest?

One of the answers provided by our sages cited by Rashi is: The function of the High Priest is to introduce the divine presence into the Jewish community that brings about the lengthening of one's days. It would be incongruous to have the murderer who shortened life co-exist with the High Priest whose function it is to prolong life.

What is it about the High Priest that made his presence incompatible with the presence of this person who committed unintentional murder? And secondly, wouldn't it be more of an analogy to state that the High Priest who performed the most important rituals in the Temple was incongruous with one who: a) disregarded his obligations **towards G-d** and failed to perform the ritual commandments, b) intentionally?

The Deeper Significance of the Holy Temple

To better appreciate the relationship of the High Priest and an individual's unintentional commission of murder, it is crucial that we understand the function of the Temple in Jerusalem, whose destruction we mourn during these three week's culminating with Tisha B'Av.

The Temple was not a shrine in the sense that other religions have shrines. We believe that G-d is all over and can be accessed all over. The Temple was the place that G-d chose, so that His presence should be felt by us wherever we are. The need for such a Temple was to overcome the natural barriers that G-d created in the world that eclipse His presence. The Temple in Jerusalem removed this barrier. When a person is so saturated with an awareness of G-d they become so sensitized to His will that they will not matter-of-factly violate G-d's will.

Once that barrier to G-d's presence was removed, G-d's presence would then be "channeled" to the rest of the city of Jerusalem and then to the rest of Israel and then to the rest of the world. One felt a connection to G-d as a result of the Temple's existence. Once connected to G-d it becomes untenable for a person to go against his will.

How Could People Sin when the Temple Stood?

At this point one can raise an obvious question. If the Temple's presence was enough to create an atmosphere of holiness, how do we account for the many transgressions that Jews committed even when the Temple stood?

The answer is that because G-d does not take away our free choice, even when there is incredible positive G-dly energy, one can rebel against G-d. Where does the G-dly spirit of the Temple manifest itself most? In it is most pronounced in the area of inadvertent transgressions.

When people are so saturated with an awareness of G-d they become so sensitized to His will that they will not matter-of-factly violate G-d's will. While the Temple's presence did not prevent willful violation of G-d's will, it did provide a far stronger protection against actions that derive from a lack of sensitivity.

This then is why the Torah contrasts the High Priest's role with that of the **unintentional** murderer. The High priest was responsible for maintaining the spiritual state of the Temple. It is unfathomable then that the person who was himself a paragon of spiritual sensitivity should be together with one whose callous insensitivity brought about the most tragic loss - a loss of life wherein the G-dly soul that once graced this world, was forced to return to its heavenly abode.

When we pray for the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash we

are asking for more than just a magnificent and imposing structure. We are demanding a return of the innocence and sensitivity that existed in the Beis Hamikdash of old. Only this time it will be forever.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

THE WANDERING JEW

The soul cannot be content with intermittent spurts of energy.

The soul, however, wants truth and consistency and will stop at nothing until it has achieved its goal.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

THE WANDERING JEW

The Sinking Rameses

The noun Jew has often been prefaced by the adjective "wandering." And it is this week's *parsha, Masei*-Journeys that details the forty-two journeys of the Jewish nation from Egypt to the Land of Israel. By analyzing the names of these places through which they traveled we can gain some insight as to how we can weather the vicissitudes of our personal journey through life and of our collective Jewish existence as well.

The first journey out of Egypt was to a place called Rameses. If Mitzrayim-Egypt connotes the state of confinement and distress that comes from a lack of independence, then Rameses is the first step in the pursuit of spiritual independence.

Rameses was ostensibly named after the Egyptian Pharaoh who carried that name. However, our Sages tell us that it is related to a Hebrew word that means to sink. When the Egyptians enslaved our ancestors and had them build cities,

they ordered them to build the structures in marshes, which caused them to sink. The Egyptian leaders did this to deny their slaves the satisfaction of knowing that their labor had any enduring value.

What this can mean in the spiritual journey of a Jew from a state of spiritual enslavement is:

The first quest and journey is to extricate ourselves from the clutches of subservience to masters other than G-d. However, no sooner that we leave Egypt, we discover that one of the features of life as a slave—the lack of a sense of accomplishment—cannot be easily taken out of our system. We land in a place that is characterized by its inability to produce lasting results.

From Ramses to Sukkos

In real life, this refers to the person who is inspired to become a better person, and reorient his or her life in the direction of the Holy Land, metaphorically speaking, but then discovers that this feeling of inspiration is short lived. This discovery can be devastating, because it makes the person feel that they are a failure and they could never really be free.

Knowing that this phenomenon is a normal part of journeying through life is somewhat comforting. But to help

us cope with this phenomenon, we travel on to the next place called Sukkos, an obvious allusion to the Festival in which we dwell in temporary homes.

This can be understood to mean that when we realize that our journey to the Promised Land can be long and protracted, we should find solace in the spiritual experiences we have, albeit of a temporary and fleeting duration. If our souls—hitherto suppressed and inhibited in the spiritual land of slavery—can feel uplifted, even sporadically, in the beginning of our journey, this too is progress.

From Sukkos to Eisam

But the soul cannot be content with intermittent spurts of energy. If all the soul wanted was to express itself, it can learn to be content with occasional experiences of inspiration. The soul, however, wants truth and consistency and will stop at nothing until it has achieved its goal. This pursuit of truth is alluded to in the name of the Israelites next stop, to a place called Esam, the letters of which are the same as the Hebrew word for truth—Emes.

But alas, the pursuit of truth does not produce quick results. And that is why in the word Eisam, the letters for truth are jumbled, as if to underscore the elusive nature of this quest. Moreover, the Torah describes the location of Eisam as being "at the edge of the desert." This alludes to the feeling of

desolation and frustration that accompanies the discovery of how elusive the goal may be.

More specifically, the word Esam—while it begins with the same letter as the word Emes, an aleph, the first letter of the Hebrew Alphabet, it is followed by the last letter tav. In the word Emes, by contrast, the letter Alpeh is followed by the letter mem—the middle letter of the Alphabet, and only then the letter tav.

What is the significance of this difference?

In the pursuit of truth, it would be nice to go progressively from the first level to the last. Every step that we climb gives us a sense of accomplishment and incentive to go to the next level. There are times when we think we have already reached the end only to discover that we are still in the middle. Imagine the frustration and disillusionment one experiences when this occurs. This is what the jumbled word Esam signifies: When we think we might have reached the end of our quest for truth, we may realize that we have barely reached its mid-point.

But, the Torah tells us that the Jews continued in their journey to the Land of Israel. We should never give up hope.

The Final Step

One's personal journey is paralleled by the journey of the

Jewish people through history. This journey will lead us imminently to the Messianic Age, ushered in by Moshiach. For thousands of years we have been hoping and waiting for this day. One of the primary challenges is when we think we're there only to discover that somehow there's been a detour. The challenge we have—in our own personal journey or our collective journey through history—is to never give up. This too is one of the steps in our journey. Even at this juncture—nay particularly at this juncture—we must strengthen our faith in the promise we have heard from our leaders and prophets that the "time of your Redemption has been reached."

ESSAY NINETEEN

THE GREAT EQUALIZER

The daughters of Tzelaphechad were intellectually different but on the level of piety they were the same.

That sameness transcended their differences.

ESSAY NINETEEN
THE GREAT EQUALIZER

No Intra-Marriage

Machalah, Tirtzah, Hoglah, Milkah and Noah, the five daughters of Tzelaphechad, were undoubtedly the true founders of the women's liberation movement. In Parshas Pinchas the Torah recounted how they demanded of Moses that they should inherit their father's share in the Land of Israel, since he left no sons to inherit his portion.

G-d agreed, however, He commanded the daughters of Tzelaphechad to only marry within their own tribe. Since the identity of the tribe is established by the father, if the daughters of Tzelaphechad would have married out of their tribe, the land would have passed to their sons, thus, effectively transferring the land of their tribe to the hands of another tribe. In this week's Parsha, the Torah discusses how they fulfilled that directive and married only within their tribe.

Different but Equal?

When the Torah lists their names here they are listed in a different order than previously. Rashi, the primary Bible commentator, explains that previously they were listed in the order of their intelligence, but here — where the Torah describes their marriage — the Torah lists them in chronological order. Rashi then concludes, the fact that the Torah lists their names in different order "teaches us that they were all equal."

Rashi's words appear to be problematic. On the one hand, Rashi states that they were listed in the order of their intelligence, implying that they were not equal, yet here Rashi claims that they were indeed equal? How could there be a significant difference between them in terms of their intelligence, and yet, they were still all regarded as equal?

The Complainers did not Complain

The answer to this question lies in the context in which their names are mentioned in this week's Parshah as opposed to last week's Parsha. In the previous Parsha, the Torah's portrays them as women who were endowed with great intelligence and who were capable of making a strong case for their right to inherit their father's share of the Land of Israel.

In this week's Parsha, however, they are portrayed as women who were sensitive to G-d's commandment that they should only marry within their tribe, so as to not to cause their tribe to lose their territory, if they were to marry "out" into another tribe. The daughters of Tzelaphechad, could have easily criticized this provision as unfair because it would limit the pool of eligible husbands for them. Just as they had argued to Moses previously, demonstrating to him that their claim for the land was fair and just, they could have just as easily demonstrated their intellectual and oratorical skills in convincing Moses that the limitation of their choices for marriage was unfair.

But, they didn't make any such complaint. Earlier, when they requested to inherit their father's land, there had been no express directive with regard to that matter. In this case, however, G-d had expressly told Moses whom they may marry—and whom they may not. This point that they did not complain is clearly stated: "Even as the L-rd commanded Moses, so did the daughters of Tzelaphechad…"

Despite the different level of intelligence that these five righteous women possessed, the Torah in this week's Parsha demonstrates that they were all equal, because in relation to intellectual achievement, living in conformance with the dictates of the Torah — even when it goes against one's understanding and interests — is far superior to intellectual achievement, notwithstanding the great emphasis Judaism

places on study and intellectual development. While there are so many differences between us intellectually and other ways, the great equalizer is when we are committed to following G-d's path, even, nay especially, when it goes against our personal convenience and preference.

Hand in Hand

Indeed, what makes knowledge great is when that knowledge goes hand in hand with action. This is summed up in the Talmudic discussion as to which is greater, Torah study or practice of the commandments. The Talmud concludes, "Study is greater, because it leads to action." In other words, the study of Torah attains the most exalted position in Judaism, when it translates into action.

Feminine Power

These great women, who were endowed with both wisdom and piety, forged the way for the Jewish people to enter into the Promised Land. Similarly, the Jewish women (and men) of our generation were given the special challenge to forge the way towards the ultimate Redemption with the coming of Moshiach.

When Maimonides, describes the "resume" of the Jewish leader who is qualified to be the Moshiach, he lists the

following: "He must be diligent in the study of Torah and is preoccupied with the commandments." To accomplish the task of Moshiach — liberating the world and making it holy — we must all combine the knowledge of Judaism with its practice, with the emphasis on practice.

ESSAY TWENTY

JOURNEYS

There are many challenges along the way in our journeys.

The first rule is that we must know our destination.

Reaching the destination, the Messianic Age, is an integral part of Judaism.

In the earlier stages of the journey, knowledge of its destination and objective was not so crucial; the focus was on the journey itself.

Now, as we reach our overarching goal, awareness of destination and objective is of paramount importance.

ESSAY TWENTY

JOURNEYS

Multiple Journeys

If there is one word that describes all of existence it is "journeys," the subject and title of this week's parsha—*Masei.*

The Soul's Journey

First, "journeys" describes what our souls have gone through to come into this world and inhabit physical bodies. The soul originates in the divinely spiritual world of Atzilus (Emanation) and must descend through myriads of levels of reduced consciousness to be able to relate to and inhabit a physical body. Every level the soul passes through is a journey and every journey is traumatic.

The Journey of Life

Second, the term "journeys" describes what we do from the moment we are born until the moment the soul leaves this

world and passes beyond. Every moment of life is designed to take us from one level of spiritual enlightenment to another. We were not intended to rest in this world; life is a perpetual journey.

Indeed, the journey of life is a journey in reverse. Birth is the culmination of the soul's journey downward into a corporeal reality which obscures its original awareness of G-d and its spiritual consciousness. Life after birth reverses that downward trend. Through every passing stage of life, when the soul engages in G-dly activities its original high level of G-dly awareness is gradually restored.

Chassidus teaches us that the soul actually reaches an even higher "place" than the one it occupied prior to its journey down below. Otherwise, why would a compassionate and loving G-d compel the soul to lose its original radiance and enter a hostile environment, punctuated with constant struggle? There must be some benefit to the soul in its descent and struggle. Indeed, the descent into our world empowers the soul to rise to an even higher "proximity" and intimacy with its Divine Source.

The Cyclical Journeys

Third, we go through mini-journeys every year, month, week and day. For example, Rosh Hashanah marks the beginning of a journey that will culminate at the end of the year. The

same is true of all other segments of time. These journeys help us to set goals and realize them. They also condition us to be goal oriented so we can have a smooth and successful life's journey.

The Longest Journey

Fourth, there is the primal journey which commenced at the time of Creation. When G-d created the world, He did so with a plan and purpose. The world has gone through many periods of development and maturation on its way to the Messianic Age. This protracted and arduous journey has taken humanity through many twists and turns but will lead us, inexorably, to our destination: the Final Redemption. This journey assumed an even greater clarity and urgency at Sinai, when G-d gave us the Torah. It is the Torah which provides us with the roadmap, navigational skills and the energy to reach our goal.

Historically speaking, this journey has been a rather bumpy one for us, with many detours and periods when we might have strayed off the road. Thank G-d, as the Rebbe told us repeatedly; we are presently at the very end of this journey; on the very threshold of the Final Redemption.

The Many Challenges

There are many challenges along the way in our journeys.

First, we must know our destination. Even Jews who are steeped in their Judaism, study Torah and perform the Mitzvos with joy may not be aware of the ultimate destination or even that there is a destination at all. However, reaching the destination is an integral part of Judaism. Chassidic literature instructs us that "G-d desired a dwelling place in our lowly world." In the beginning or middle stages of the journey, knowledge of its destination and objective was not so crucial; the focus was on the journey itself. Now, as we reach our overarching goal, awareness of destination and objective is of paramount importance.

Second, one must be careful not to make a wrong turn. History is replete with distressing stories of individuals and groups who decided that they knew the way better than their Torah leaders and mentors. As a result of their straying, many Jews were tragically lost to Judaism. Even in the days of the Holy Temple, when G-d's presence was revealed beyond all doubt, there were movements that deviated from Judaism. Inevitably their descendants were lost to the Jewish people. In the days of the First Temple there were Jews who rationalized a parallel idol worship. In

the Second Temple era the Hellenists and Sadducees rejected fundamental parts of Judaism.

GPS: Geulah Positioning System

To reach our destination we must make use of our spiritual GPS, Geulah Positioning System. Torah is the ultimate guide that shows us where we are going and how to get there. But, in order to not distort the Torah's directions, we need the inner dimension of Torah articulated in the illuminating teachings of Chassidus. In addition to the emphasis Chassidus places on the final destination, it is also assists us to deal with our egos' distortion of the message. Our egos drive us to make Torah conform to what we want rather than to what G-d wants.

For the GPS to work efficiently we cannot be content with the inner teachings of the Torah; we also need a Rebbe, a spiritual, egoless leader who steers us in the right direction.

One of the instructions our Rebbe gave us was that each and every one of us should have a *mashpia*-mentor. A personal mentor who will be objective in guiding us will ensure that we won't fall into the trap of going in the direction of our egos. The qualifications of the mentor, the Rebbe stated, are that he or she must be kind, compassionate, and modest.

"Happy is the One who Waits"

A third challenge in our life's journey, and particularly in the ultimate journey towards the Messianic Age, is maintaining a high level of interest, enthusiasm and anticipation for the Redemption. Judaism requires not only belief in Moshiach and Redemption but to hope for it, desire it and eagerly anticipate it. According to Chida (an 18th century Sage), the very act of hoping for and anticipating Moshiach is what hastens his coming.

Not surprisingly, the longer we have waited and hoped for salvation the more difficult it is to maintain this high level of anticipation. The closer we get to the end of our journey, this challenge becomes more pronounced. After traversing the same road for millennia we can easily appreciate how some have lost their enthusiasm for the Redemption; tragically, they let go and gave up. We have experienced so many bitter disappointments that it is hard to maintain the same level of excitement about the Redemption we had in the past. Ideally, our expectations for Redemption should increase the closer we get to the end. In practical terms, the length of our journey has weakened the faith and excitement of some. Disillusionment with Moshiach's delay is arguably our greatest challenge today.

This might explain why the Biblical Book of Daniel, speaking of the end of days, says: "Happy is the one who waits."

Waiting and anticipating Moshiach are great virtues, particularly in these end times, precisely because the longer we have waited the greater the challenge and therefore the greater the praise and reward.

Moreover, according to Rashi the praise for waiting refers not to one who has waited at the beginning or the middle of the journey. It refers specifically to the one who sees "Moshiach revealed and then concealed." In other words, when we see the positive changes in the world which demonstrate Moshiach's impact on the world and then there is a pause, that is the moment when waiting and anticipating Moshiach is most challenging.

There might be a hint to the focus on generating desire for Redemption in this week's parsha. After listing all of the 42 journeys the Jewish nation traversed in the desert, the Torah enumerates the boundaries of the Land of Israel. When the Torah speaks of the final stretch of land on the eastern boundary, it uses the term *V'hisavisem*, which is translated as "turning," referring to the eastern borders you will find when you turn east. However, the Chassidic work Tiferes Shlomo, translates it as "and you shall desire." He interprets this to mean that your journey towards the Promised Land must be one of desire. A Jew must work on generating his or her desire for the Redemption when we will return to the entire Land of Israel and live within the original boundaries described in the Torah.

The lesson for our time is clear: Even when we have completed the 42 journeys of our history, even as we have circumnavigated and encompassed all of our boundaries save for the last one, it is crucial that we don't lose any of our faith, hope and desire for the Redemption.

One may connect this novel translation to the literal reading as "turning." We have turned the final corner and should have reached our destination, but that has not yet occurred. We should, nevertheless, not lose any of our desire and enthusiasm for Moshiach and Redemption.

This lesson is particularly relevant and poignant now. We have entered the period known as the "Three Weeks," when we reflect on the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash and hope and pray for the imminent rebuilding of the Third Bais Hamikdash. When things appear bleak, **especially** when they appear bleak, we must muster all of our inner faith and generate even more profound feelings of faith and anticipation for the Final Redemption.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

CITIES OF SENSITIVITY

Collectively, the Jewish people have been subjected to the paradoxical phenomenon of being hounded by the other nations who threaten to exterminate us, and being provided by G-d throughout history with places of refuge that have guaranteed our survival.

This phenomenon is what our Sages referred to when they spoke of "exile," that parallels the City of Refuge.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

CITIES OF SENSITIVITY

What *Does* the Torah Want?

Jewish law seems to express contradictory feelings towards a person who killed someone unintentionally; a crime we might refer to today as "criminally negligent homicide," discussed in this week's parsha

On the one hand, the Torah allows the relatives of the victim to avenge the death of their loved one by killing the perpetrator.

On the other hand, the Torah provided "Cities of Refuge" for the killer. In those cities, and only in those cities, he was protected.

And here the question arises: What does the Torah really want?

Does the Torah feel that the negligent actions—that led to the death of an innocent person—is so serious a crime that people are permitted to avenge the tragic death of their loved ones by killing the perpetrator? If that is the case, why

does the Torah facilitate his escape to these cities where it would be impossible for the relatives to get him?

And if the Torah did not condone the death of the perpetrator, why then did the Torah permit this act of revenge in the instance that the killer did not escape to the Cities of Refuge?

The Age of Desensitization

This anomaly will serve as one illustration of how apparent contradictions in the Torah were intended to impart an important lesson. And since the Torah is eternal, there must be a lesson for us in the present day and age as well.

We are living in a world where violence against our fellow human being is so rampant and pervasive that we don't even take note of a murder unless it is an unusually grotesque form of murder; or as our legal system puts it: "aggravated murder." Just plain snuffing out a life of another is not enough to make headlines. There must be some political overtones or some bizarre twist to a violent crime to make it newsworthy and to arouse our interest and concern.

In short, we have become inured to violence, as well as other vices, and this insensitivity, in the long run, can lead to the total breakdown of society.

If this is true about willful and pre-meditated murder, how much more so has it become reality with regard to the effects of negligence.

To underscore the seriousness of violent crimes, in general, and those that are committed due to negligence, in particular, the Torah permitted the relative to exact revenge from the murderer. And while he could easily escape to the Cities of Refuge, nevertheless, the person charged with criminally negligent homicide will always be reminded of the severity of his actions and the need to foster greater sensitivity to life and to others. By living in these special cities to avoid being killed, the murderer will never again be desensitized to the wellbeing of others. Only when we are vulnerable do we feel and take to heart the pain that we have caused others.

Galus: Cities of Refuge

Collectively, the Jewish people have been subjected to the paradoxical phenomenon of being hounded by the other nations who threaten to exterminate us, and being provided by G-d throughout history with places of refuge that have guaranteed our survival. This phenomenon is what our Sages referred to when they spoke of "exile," that parallels the City of Refuge.

When we lived in the Land of Israel and had possession of the Holy Temple, we lost our sensitivity towards G-d and one another, because we did not feel our own vulnerability. By going into exile, G-d was not punishing us, but forcing us to realize the precariousness of our own existence, so that we do not take it for granted and that we become more sensitive to G-d and others.

Demand of G-d to take us Out of the Cities of Refuge

However, just as with regards to the Cities of Refuge, the Torah was not interested in making the life of its residents miserable. Rather, it was intended to bring an end to insensitivity. Similarly, the purpose of exile was not a punishment for the sake of punishment, but a way to make us more receptive to G-d and other people.

Of course, we cannot use this rationale as an explanation for all of our suffering throughout the ages. And it is incumbent upon us to constantly demand of G-d to take us out of the "Cities of Refuge," and usher in a time when we will no longer know any suffering and pain. Nevertheless, while we cannot comprehend or make peace with exile conditions, no matter how benign they might seem, we must learn the lessons that exile imparts to us:

Don't take G-d, Torah, Mitzvos, our fellow Jew and human being for granted. Be sensitive to all of the above, even as we pray to finally be liberated form the need to learn this lesson.

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

THE FOUR EXILES

The designation of the Jewish people as Israel was based on their transcendence of nature.

The name Israel was given to the Patriarch Jacob because he "fought with G-d's angel (a metaphor for the forces of nature as well) and people (other nations) and prevailed."

The name Israel denotes all that was anathema to the Greeks for it underscores the distinctive role of the Jewish people and their ability to conquer nature and transcend it.

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO
THE FOUR EXILES

The End!

This week's parsha—in one way—represents the end of the entire Torah. In the last talk that we were privileged to hear from the Rebbe, he explained how the Torah essentially ends with the Book of Numbers. Deuteronomy is actually a restatement of the other books of the Torah.

It is therefore no coincidence that the last parsha of this "last" book of the Torah deals with the journeys of the Jewish people from Egypt until their entry into the Promised Land. The Ba'al Shem Tov taught that the forty-two journeys listed in this parsha reflect all of the journeys of each individual Jew as well

The Chida (Rabbi Chaim Yosef Dovid Azulai one of the great Sephardic Sages of the eighteenth century) writes in his work Nachal Kedumim that the opening four words of this parsha "*Eileh masei bnei Yisrael*-these are the journeys of the Children of Israel" allude to the four periods of exile that the

Jewish people have lived through. These four periods are named after the dominant empire that exiled them and subjected them to the suffering of exile. They are—in chronological order—*Bavel*-Babylonia, *Madai*-Media (Persia), *Yavan*-Greece, and *Edom*-Rome. The initials of the first four words of our parsha are (1) an *Aleph*, which stands for *Edom*; (2) *Mem*, which stands for *Madai*; (3) *Beis*, which stands for *Bavel* and *Yud (4)*, which stands for *Yavan*.

The Greek Exile

We will begin our analysis of these four exiles and their relationship to the first four words of this parsha with the final word Yisrael/Israel which corresponds to the Greek exile.

The Greeks did not try to annihilate the Jews. They were not opposed to the Jewish people living in their own land. They were not even opposed to the Jewish people studying Torah and observing the commandments. As long as one viewed the Jewish people as a nation like any other nation the Greeks could tolerate Jewish nationhood. As long as the Jews would view the Torah merely as a beautiful piece of literature they were not opposed to its study. As long as the Jews observed the *Mitzvos* because they were logical or because they possessed some utilitarian value it was also acceptable to the Greeks.

The Greeks worshipped logic and nature and were in love with aesthetic beauty. And they also glorified the human body. What they could not countenance, however, was a belief in the transcendence of nature. They could not tolerate an observance that defied logic. And they were horrified by any gesture that—in their eyes—denigrated the human body.

They were therefore opposed to the Jewish approach to Torah, that is that it is G-d's wisdom and therefore transcended the human mind.

The Greeks were therefore also opposed to the *Mitzvos* which were not based on rational foundations.

Their tyrannical rule therefore began by banning circumcision. Why circumcision?

Circumcision alters the natural state of the body, the body that they deemed perfect in its natural unaltered state. In addition, circumcision is performed on the eighth day to indicate that it is all about transcending the order of creation—which is divided into cycles of seven. This clearly was the very antithesis of the Greek belief system. Circumcision also singles out the Jew and sets him apart from other nations. Again, this was diametrically opposite to their conception of all nations being equal and only the level of one's physical, intellectual and artistic attainments can distinguish one from another.

Their goal was therefore to eradicate: a) the belief in a G-d that transcended nature; b) a Torah that professed Divine knowledge; c) an observance that altered the body and promoted a supra-rational attitude towards the *Mitzvos*, and d) the notion of the distinctiveness of the Jewish people.

The designation of the Jewish people as Israel was based on their transcendence of nature. The name Israel was given to the Patriarch Jacob because he "fought with G-d's angel (a metaphor for the forces of nature as well) and people (other nations) and prevailed." The name Israel denotes all that was anathema to the Greeks for it underscores the distinctive role of the Jewish people and their ability to conquer nature and transcend it.

Thus the word Yisrael and its ideal represent the power we possess to counter the element of exile that is represented by *Yavan*-Greece.

The Babylonian exile

The third opening word of this parsha is *bnei*, meaning the "children of." As stated above, this word—that begins with the letter *beis*—alludes to *Galut Bavel*, the Babylonian exile.

The word *bnei* numerically adds up to 62. The Babylonian Empire, from the day it exiled the King Yehoyachin (in the

eighth year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzer-II Melachim 24:12) until it was conquered by Persia, lasted 62 years.

In addition there is a connection between the word *bnei* and the Babylonian exile. When G-d sends His children into exile and provides them with all their spiritual and material needs this Divine care represents an indication that He treats the Jewish peoples as His children. When a loving parent disciplines and punishes his or her child by distancing them, the parent makes sure that the children will not suffer needlessly and that they will be able to eventually extricate themselves from their exile.

This phenomenon was most clearly demonstrated with the Babylonian exile in which the elite of the Jewish people were the first to be exiled. This enabled them to cultivate the Babylonian landscape with centers of Torah and to pave the way for Jews to continue to thrive in the spiritual sense. In addition, the Jewish leaders were appointed by the Babylonian King to be his advisors, which assisted the Jewish people in their exile in the material arena as well.

To describe the way we are able to survive and endure the exile we focus on the word "*b'nei*". We must constantly remind ourselves that we are G-d's children and that He will never abandon us, even as we live in these last moments of exile.

The Median-Persian Exile

The second word *masei*, which means journeys, alludes to the Median or Persian exile, as was noted above.

One connection can be found between the word *masei* and the Persian exile that relates to its numerical value. *Masei* numerically is 180. When we read the Book of Esther we discover the number 180 prominently featured at the very beginning. The Persian monarch Achashveirosh threw a party that lasted 180 days. The objective of this party, our Sages tell us, was to demonstrate his consolidation of power. It was, in his mind, the celebration of his triumph over the Jewish people. The Jews were still his subjects and were precluded from building their Holy Temple in Jerusalem despite the fact that the seventy years that had been predicted for the exile to last had already passed—at least according to his miscalculations. In effect, what highlighted and came to symbolize the Median/Persian exile was the number 180.

There is also a connection between these 180 days and the idea of "journeys", the translation of *masei*.

The reason the feast lasted for 180 days, some commentators explain, was to afford every citizen of his vast empire the opportunity to travel to Shushan and participate in that party. Achashveirosh wanted to demonstrate his consolidation of power by having members of all his

provinces attend. According to the Talmudic Sages, sailors—who travel to and fro the most remote places—would stay away from home for periods of a half a year at a time, the equivalent of 180 days. The number 180 therefore can symbolize the extraordinary lengths some will go in journeying to participate in an orgiastic experience of witnessing the Jews' exile, the feast of a monarch who gloats over the state of exile the Jewish people are in.

It follows that the way to counter these shameful trips into exile is by the journeys we make to join other Jews in their celebrations of Jewish Holidays or to be in the presence of teachers of Torah in general and our Rebbe in particular. Likewise, the figurative journeys we make to grow in our Judaism is the way to counter the negative journeys that are associated with the Persian exile.

The Edomite Exile: No End in Sight?

And finally, the word *eilah* - 'these are' - represents the exile of Edom, identified as the Roman Empire and its successors who destroyed the Second Temple and who subsequently sent us into the longest and most difficult of all our exiles.

Why is this exile represented by the word *eileh*-these are?

The Midrash states that whenever the Torah uses this word—as opposed to the word *v'eilah*: "And these are,"—it

is intended to negate that which came before. It is an indication that that which follows is totally beyond that which preceded it.

The Edomite exile is so harsh that it negates and eclipses all preceding exiles. As the Talmud (Yoma 9b) states: "The earlier ones (i.e., the Jews who lived at the time of the destruction of the first Temple by the Babylonians) whose sins were revealed had their end revealed; the later ones (i.e., the Jews who lived at the time of the destruction of the second Temple by the Romans) whose sins were not revealed, their end was not revealed."

This cryptic statement is understood by Rashi and other commentators to mean that the reason our exile is so long and arduous—as compared to earlier exiles—is because the sins that precipitated this exile involved **hidden** evil. The hatred people harbored for one another was concealed. Therefore, the end of this exile is also hidden from us; for centuries there has been no end in sight.

Thus, the word *eilah* which negates all that comes before is an allusion to the present exile, referred to as the Edomite exile, because it is qualitatively much more difficult than all the other exiles.

How do we get out of this exile?

Among the various approaches that the Rebbe has emphasized—praying and demanding Redemption, learning

Torah concerning Moshiach and Redemption, opening our eyes to see the G-dly energy and good in everything, accepting the authority of Moshiach, increasing our acts of goodness and kindness, etc. etc.—he also repeatedly called for reversing the senseless hatred syndrome that precipitated the exile in the first place. This suggests that instead of senseless hatred we should be cultivating "senseless love," i.e., unconditional love for our fellow.

This message, too, can be found in the word *eileh. Eilah*, which translates as "these are", is an expression that denotes clarity and openness. Whatever we are discussing is in front of us. We can point to it. This clarity is the opposite of the hidden evil the Talmud cited above mentioned as the cause of the length and uncertainty of the present exile. We need to counter this uncertainty with clear and demonstrable love.

ESSAY TWENTY-THREE

INNOCENT WHEN PROVEN GUILTY

Every Jew possesses some measure of good.

There are differences, as to the degree to which this good is covered up and concealed.

When the judges find merit in a criminal, this is a sign that they have found his inner good and is therefore "capable" of receiving punishment that will prove beneficial.

ESSAY TWENTY-THREE

INNOCENT WHEN PROVEN GUILTY

Unanimity

When the Sanhedrin, the Jewish court would try a person for a capital crime, a conviction would be obtained if the majority of the 23 judges would vote for conviction. Actually, it must be a majority of two.

From this week's Torah portion of *Masei*, the Talmud derives a very intriguing and enigmatic law. If the vote for conviction was unanimous, the accused is ruled innocent! The Talmud (Sanhedrin 17a) explains this rather unusual ruling in the following manner.

The Torah, in this week's Parsha, requires the judges to "judge and save." In other words their role is to serve both as the prosecution and the defense. For this reason, a final decision in a capital case is always delayed to the next day so that they might still find some "virtue" or exculpatory evidence. These judges (who have voted unanimously for conviction), however, are so set in their way, that they will

no longer be capable of defending the accused.

Impartiality

The simple logic behind this explanation is that a judge must maintain a certain degree of impartiality. If a judge, for example, witnessed the crime personally, he would be ineligible to rule on that matter in a capital case. How can he be an objective judge? Once he had seen the crime, there is no room in his mind for acquittal.

Similarly, once all the judges have decided against the accused it is an indication that they are of one mind and cannot see another side of this individual or the case.

The Theory of Punishment

Chassidic thought explains this law on a deeper level, by reflecting on the very basis of the law that requires that the judges seek to find some virtue in the accused. Even when someone is convicted and will be punished by the court, the object of the punishment is not for the sake of vengeance, G-d-forbid. G-d's only reason for assigning punishment to a person is for his own good. By enduring the punishment, the criminal is cleansed from his impurity and evil.

By finding merit and virtue in the criminal, the court

reveals that the criminal is not all evil and can be cleansed. The existence of some measurable good is a positive sign that the punishment will succeed in overtaking the evil and expunging it.

In truth, **every** Jew possesses some measure of good. There are differences, as to the degree to which this good is covered up and concealed. When the judges find merit in the criminal, this is a sign that they have found his inner good and is therefore "capable" of receiving punishment that will prove beneficial.

If the criminal is so evil, that the most sensitive and perceptive sages of the Sanhedrin could not detect even a trace of good — despite the fact that everybody possesses this spark of goodness, that means that the judges cannot possibly do their job adequately, because the criminal will not be helped and cleansed by the punishment. Then, Torah does not allow meting out punishment by the courts, because the punishment will not lead to the person's complete atonement.

Our Phenomenal Virtue

The lesson one can derive from this law and its explanation is mind-boggling. If a vicious criminal cannot be punished because the Sanhedrin failed to find his redeeming qualities, then certainly we all possess incredible virtue.

If we ever had any questions as to how we will be redeemed, considering the fact that we are far from perfection, the answer is that, on the contrary, we are all virtuous. If there is an appearance of evil, it is only on the surface and caused most likely by the harsh conditions of *Galus*, exile.

Another important lesson:

Just as the criminal's inner good was brought to the surface, when the Sanhedrin searched for and exposed his virtue, similarly, when we speak well of our fellow, we will enable that individual to fully express his/her inner goodness. It is this extra measure of goodness, when exposed, will bring about the imminent coming of Moshiach. Moshiach's task is to complete this process of bringing out the potential goodness and holiness of every person, that will ultimately lead to universal peace and harmony.

ESSAY TWENTY-FOUR

PARADOX OF JUDAISM: RIGIDITY AND FLEXIBILITY

When it comes to exercising leadership, one must have rigid standards.

One cannot bend because the people are asking for changes.

One cannot follow the way the wind is blowing to determine what standards to establish for society.

The same can be said for one's internal "government" and leadership role.

Our mind was designed by G-d to rule over our emotions. In this pursuit there can be no equivocation.

ESSAY TWENTY-FOUR

PARADOX OF JUDAISM: RIGIDITY AND FLEXIBILITY

Two Kinds of People

There are two types of people. Some people are very rigid. They do not like change. Everything must be done precisely the way it was always done. The rigid individual is strict and demanding.

Because rigid people are temperamentally so, they are most comfortable to live within a system that is similarly rigid.

Some people, on the other hand, are very flexible. They thrive on change because they have an instinctive capacity to adapt to these changes. The flexible individual is also more tolerant of others who do not play by the rules.

Because flexible people are temperamentally so, they feel most comfortable to live within a loose and unstructured society.

In their extreme forms both of these traits can be destructive. The rigid extremist can find no room for accommodation and tolerance. He can be unforgiving and even brutal.

Similarly, flexibility in its extreme form can lead to a complete breakdown of standards within that individual and also affect society as a whole. Flexibility, in its extreme form, will inevitably lead to permissiveness and promiscuity.

Balance

Common sense dictates, thus, that there must be a balance between the two. But, common sense does not necessarily inform us how to create this balance. Only the Torah, the guide to life given to us by the Creator of life, can shed light on how to combine these diametrically opposed characteristics. We must therefore, explore the Torah's view of these two traits and how they can be successfully synthesized.

This week, the Torah portion is a composite of two separate portions: *Matos* and *Masei*. The word *Matos* means the Leaders of the tribes. But, literally, the word *Matos* means "staffs." A leader – like a staff – is often rigid and unbending, because the leader must have high standards for himself as well as what he demands of others.

The name of the second portion, *Masei* means "journeys," referring specifically to the journeys of the Jewish nation from Egypt to the Land of Israel, and symbolizing the notion of flexibility and change as we travel through the vicissitudes of life.

Matos and Masei: Be Rigid and Flexible!

To appreciate when rigidity and firmness are in order and when flexibility and change should be followed, we should reflect on the context of this week's two Torah portions.

When it comes to exercising leadership, one must have rigid standards. One cannot bend because the people are asking for changes. One cannot follow the way the wind is blowing to determine what standards to establish for society.

The same can be said for one's internal "government" and leadership role. Our mind was designed by G-d to rule over our emotions. In this pursuit there can be no equivocation. The standards of logic must not be compromised because the emotions feel like going in a different direction. If I know that something is wrong, I dare not give in to my fickle and often destructive emotions.

When, however, we look at our status today, we must never feel the need to remain fixed to that level. Every day we must journey from one level to a higher level. We must never tell ourselves, if the level I am at today is good, let me lock myself into it. Everyone must grow. What was good yesterday is not good enough for today.

This idea of continuous change and growth is especially valid for one who views life as a continuous process that leads inexorably to the realization of a goal. This goal, according to Jewish teaching, is Moshiach and Redemption. From this

vantage point every day is different. Every day brings us one day closer to the Redemption, and therefore, we must grow spiritually in a way that is commensurate with our proximity to Redemption.

Moshiach is referred in the Psalms (110) as a staff-Mateh because he will be a king who will exercise his authority over himself and all of the world. He will reveal the inner strength of our soul, referred to as *the eisan* of our soul.

But Moshiach is also the leader who will lead us from one level to the next and continuing endlessly from strength to strength. Moshiach is the ultimate synthesis of Matos and Masei.

ESSAY TWENTY-FIVE

PROVISIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

In our generation it is the Lubavitcher Rebbe who has led and continues to lead the Jewish people in the effort to hasten the Redemption.

This, we can do, the Rebbe taught, by increasing in all matters of goodness and kindness.

Every good thought, word or deed, can be the proverbial gesture that will break the proverbial back of exile.

ESSAY TWENTY-FIVE

PROVISIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

A Common Thread

In a regular (non-leap) year many of the weekly Torah portions are combined. It has been suggested that double portions share a common theme. This week we combine the two portions of Matos and Masei. What, we may ask is the connection between these two sections?

The beginning of Matos is about vows and the beginning of Masei is about the journeys of the Children of Israel in the desert, on their way from Egyptian bondage to the Promised Land.

The connection between these two themes (vows and journeys) can be explained in the following manner.

42 Life's Journeys

The Ba'al Shem Tov taught that all of the forty-two journeys enumerated here are the story of our own journey. They reflect the journeys of life that each of us experiences on the

way to realizing our soul's mission in this world. The journey begins the moment the soul "descends" into this physical world fraught with all sorts of distractions to the interests of the soul. The soul's mission is to overcome the obstacles and distractions and to bring the soul's G-dly light into all aspect of our world.

But, the soul comes from a heavenly place (yes, Jews do believe in heaven, albeit differently from the way other religions define it) that does not have all of the impediments that the soul will experience in this world. How will the innocent soul have the capacity to contend with all of the nonsense it will encounter in a world that is filled with temptation, deception and impurity?

The Soul's Oath

The answer to this question is provided by the Talmud, which states that before the person is born G-d administers an oath to the soul: "Be righteous and do not be wicked."

The question has been asked, why is this oath necessary? The soul certainly wants to do what is right on its own. The soul has no desire to not be righteous. Furthermore, what precisely does it mean to administer an oath to an ethereal being as a soul?

Chassidic thought explains the meaning of the oath in the context of a soul entering this world by defining the meaning of an oath in a broader fashion. When a person makes a vow to do something, they are acknowledging that they want to commit themselves to a certain behavior, but their will may not be strong enough to withstand the pressures that militate against the fulfillment of their commitment.

For example: A person may want to volunteer for a worthwhile endeavor. But they know that the exigencies of life and human nature will eventually chip away at the idealistic mindset at the time one considered volunteering. One will make excuses why they cannot do what they originally intended to do. These people are well-intentioned but lack the strength of character to maintain their idealism.

By making the oath to fulfill their ideals they are invoking G-d's divine power to come to their assistance and boost their soul's determination to prevail in the face of what may seem insurmountable obstacles. An oath is a trigger that unleashes a surge of spiritual power that will buttress the soul's own energy to be able to cope with new and often unexpected difficulties.

So when the Talmud states that the soul is given an oath by G-d it really means that soul, upon entering the body, is given a boost of G-dly power that enables it to meet the challenge of living in a spiritually hostile environment.

Satiating Our Souls

Indeed, it has been pointed out, that the word for an oath in Hebrew "*sh'vuah*" is etymologically related to the word "*sova*" that means satiation. (Both words have the same three consonants of: shin, beis, and ayin in their root.)

An oath is thus a device that nurtures our defenses and invigorates our soul, enabling it to overcome the obstacles that stand in the way of its life's journey and mission.

Journeying Needs the Oath

We can now see the connection between the two Torah portions of Matos and Masei: The former discusses the power of the oath; the latter the journey of the Jews in the desert. One cannot traverse the "desert" and realize his or her life's purpose without the added inspiration that the soul receives at birth. It is the oath and the energy that it represents that enables our soul to prevail and reach its final destination unharmed.

However, the name of the first portion Matos that discusses oaths and vows actually means "tribes," and does not mean oaths or vows. Moses was addressing these laws to the leaders of the tribes. This suggests, as Rashi explains, that a vow can be nullified by a leading rabbi (or a panel of three rabbis). There are times that one may make a vow without

regard for the negative consequences that the implementation of the vow may bring. The Torah provides for one's ability to have his or her vows renounced by this leading rabbi or panel of three rabbis.

Annulling Vows

What, we may ask, is the spiritual significance of the vow being annulled? If the meaning of the vow in the context of the soul coming into our world is that the soul needs to be nourished and sated with additional divine energy, why would we want to have that vow (read: enhanced spiritual energy removed)?

The answer is that once the soul is here, it must look to other sources of inspiration and cannot rely on the energy it received before birth. The process of going before the leading rabbi to annul the vow can actually be understood as the rabbi serving as the substitute for the original boost of energy at birth.

Connecting to Spiritual Leaders

Our connection with the spiritual leaders and mentors of our generation takes the place of the divine inspiration that we receive at birth. And while at the beginning of life's journey we must be nurtured by a divine initiative, once we

are in the middle of the journey, we must create our own sources of added inspiration to buttress the soul's own power. This we do by getting close to the towering spiritual leaders of our own day and age; learning their teachings and emulating their behavior.

And unlike the oath that we were administered before birth in which we were passive recipients of G-d's light, we now become active participants in the process, by developing an ongoing two-way relationship with the teachers of Torah and the masters of G-dly knowledge.

The journeys of the Jewish nation in the desert that parallels the journey of our souls, can serve as model for the journey of the Jewish people throughout history. When we started this long arduous journey, G-d had administered an oath to us at Sinai, which uplifted us and provided us with the stamina to persevere and thrive for over 3,000 years!

But, the Torah tells us that we cannot rest on our laurels and rely on the jolt we received then. In every generation we must renew our ties with the experience at Sinai. This we do by connecting to the teachers and leaders of each generation who form an unbroken chain of teachers going back to Sinai.

Six Ways to get Over the Top

All of the above is particularly true in these momentous times that have been described by multitude of sages as the "heels of Moshiach," i.e., the final stage of exile on the cusp of the Messianic era, and the final push has started.

Now, more than ever, it is crucial that we connect to the teachings of the Torah and follow the direction of the leaders of our times.

In our generation it is the Lubavitcher Rebbe who has led and continues to lead the Jewish people in this effort to hasten the Redemption. This, we can do, the Rebbe taught, by increasing in all matters of goodness and kindness. Every good thought, word or deed, can be the proverbial gesture that will break the proverbial back of exile.

The Rebbe placed special emphasis on the following six instructions as ways to "get us over the top":

(a) Never ceasing to beseech G-d to bring an end to the suffering and pain of exile. We are not only permitted to demand the Redemption, we are obligated to do so!

(b) Studying Torah, specifically the parts of Torah that deal with Moshiach and Redemption. Torah study helps to reorient our minds to think in positive, and Messianic ways.

(c) Living our lives in a "Moshiach oriented" way, i.e., in a more positive, loving and holy manner; the way we imagine we will be living once the Redemption is here.

(d) Opening our eyes to see the new reality of the historic times we are in; seeing the miracles that have happened before our very eyes.

(e) Unconditional acceptance of and love for each other, and

(f) Preparing ourselves to greet Moshiach by accepting his authority.

ESSAY TWENTY-SIX

A JOURNEY WITHOUT AN END

The 42 journeys from Egypt are all characterized as journeys from *Mitzraim*-Egypt .

Each and every journey that took then further away from the geographic region known as *Mitzraim*, they were simultaneously breaking out of yet another level and layer of confinement and spiritual stagnation.

In the realm of goodness and holiness, staying in one place is undesirable and sometimes even harmful.

ESSAY TWENTY-SIX

A JOURNEY WITHOUT AN END

Torah Not a History Book!

The second of the two Torah readings, this *Shabbos* is called *Masei*, the journeys. In the beginning of this Parsha the Torah recounts the 42 journeys of the Jewish people from the time they left Egypt to the time that they were poised to enter the promised Land — the Land of Israel.

When we begin to analyze the significance of the Torah recounting these 42 journeys, the obvious question arises. The Torah is not a history book. As its name implies, Torah is a book of Divine instruction and guidance. What significance is there in recounting the journeys the Jewish people traveled when they left Egypt?

Why Plural?

To understand the Torah's message to us, we should examine the terminology employed by the Torah in this matter. "These are the journeys of the Children of Israel that left from the Land of Egypt." The use of the plural

"journeys" in reference to the exodus from Egypt implies that it took more than one journey to leave Egypt. This is rather strange, inasmuch as it took only one journey to get out of the land called Egypt. When they left Ramses and arrive in Sukkot, they had already crossed the border and were no longer in Egypt. Had the Torah written "These are the journeys **from** the land of Egypt **to** the land of Israel" it would have made sense. But, now that the Torah writes only of their journeys **from** the the Land of Egypt, it begs for an explanation.

Spiritual *Mitzraim*

Chassidic literature abounds with references to the deeper meaning of the word *Mitzraim,* the Hebrew name for Egypt. The root of the word can actually be traced to the word that means "confinement" or "in distress." One can easily understand why the Torah gives this name to Egypt, due to the brutal nature of oppression the Jewish people experienced during their stay there.

But there is more to the name than its connotation of physical oppression. *Mitzraim* also — and perhaps, primarily —implies the stifling of one's spiritual state. Thus, the mere fact that the exodus from Egypt marked the end of slavery and brutal oppression, it did not mean that the Jewish nation were totally out of *Mitzraim*.

Upon their departure from Egypt, the Jewish people were free. They were no longer slaves in a hostile environment, and they may no longer have carried with them an Egyptian Passport, but by no means were they completely out of the woods. As much as they were out of one aspect — albeit a significant one — of *Mitzraim* — the place that represented the nadir of impurity in the spiritual sense that mirrored the physical degradation — they were still not out of *Mitzraim* in all senses of the word. With every journey further, however, they were able to emerge from one more layer of confinement and constraints.

Thus, when the Torah lists the 42 journeys from Egypt, they are all characterized as .journeys from *Mitzraim*. Each and every journey that took then further away from the geographic region known as *Mitzraim*, they were simultaneously breaking out of yet another level and layer of confinement and spiritual stagnation, because in the realm of goodness and holiness, staying in one place is undesirable and sometimes even harmful.

Ending the Four Exiles

This lesson concerning the need to continually "break" out of *Mitzraim*, coincides with the fact that this week's Parsha concludes the fourth of the Five Books of Moses. Chassidic literature discusses how each of the four books of the

Torah correspond to one of the four exiles that we went through. This means that each book of the Torah enables us to break out of a different form of exile, until we reach the fifth book, which corresponds to the Redemption. This is analogous to the four cups of wine that we drink at the seder that correspond to the four expressions of redemption. The fifth cup is said to correspond to the fifth expression that represents our complete return to the Promised Land of Israel.

To effect this process of redemption, it is crucial that we realize the lesson of the multiple journeys from Egypt-*Mitzraim*. When we realize that no matter how much we removed ourselves from undesirable situations that are analogous to *Mitzraim*, we must continue to journey out of even subtle forms of constraint, continuously aspiring to greater heights. Until we reach our ultimate but imminent destination — Moshiach and Redemption — we are not out of *Mitzraim*.

The realization that we have to strive for our departure from yet another level that confines, limits and inhibits us, only to realize that we still have to move on, is the way we actually hasten the process of the Redemption.

ESSAY TWENTY-SEVEN

LONG LIVE THE KING

Rabbi Mendel of Kotzk:

The nation Moab was needed to give the Jewish people the concept of kingship.

The entire concept of people empowered to exercise authority over others is foreign to the Jewish ethos.

The idea of leadership had to be 'borrowed' from Moab.

ESSAY TWENTY-SEVEN

LONG LIVE THE KING

No War Against Moab

G-d instructed Moses to wage war against Midian for causing the Jewish people to sin, causing them much grief. As the last major campaign before he was to pass, G-d instructed Moses to take revenge on the Midianites, and only then pass on.

Rashi addresses the question of why not wage war against Moab as well? Both Moab and Midian conspired against the Jewish people. It was Balak the king of Moab who hired Bilam to curse the Jewish people and who instigated the daughters of Moab and Midian to lure Jewish men into immorality and idolatry. It would appear from this that Moab was far more culpable of harming the Jewish people than Midian.

Rashi's answer is that the Moabites had a good reason to engage the Jews; they feared that the Jews would despoil them. The Midianites, by contrast, joined in the conflict for no good reason; just for the sake of conflict.

While this explanation demonstrates the absolute evil of the Midianites, it does not get the Moabites off the hook. They were still extremely evil in the way they treated the Jewish people. Why then were we commanded then, and for all time, not to provoke the Moabites into war?

Moab the Progenitor of Ruth, David and Moshiach

Rashi offers a second, more compelling reason not to wage war against Moab; Ruth would descend from them.

Rashi was not content to rest his argument on the first explanation because if Moab was just less guilty than Midian that does not excuse them entirely. Rashi's second explanation provides a more reasonable justification for not waging war against a nation that would in the future be responsible for Ruth and from her the lineage of King David through Moshiach.

What is it about Moab that gave them the privilege of producing the matriarch of the Davidic dynasty, which will include Moshiach? And what redeeming quality shielded them from destruction in spite of their evil efforts to harm the Jewish people?

Royalty on Loan

Shem Mishmuel, a Chassidic work, cites the explanation of Rabbi Mendel of Kotzk that Moab was needed to give the Jewish people the concept of kingship. The entire concept of people empowered to exercise authority over others is foreign to the Jewish ethos. The idea of leadership had to be 'borrowed' from Moab.

On the surface this premise is hard to understand. Moses was a king and so was Joshua, yet unlike king David they did not have any biological connection to Moab. How did they become kings?

Second, throughout biblical and rabbinic literature the position of royalty is greatly extoled. In our prayers we pray for the time when the royal house of David will be reinstated. The greatest human being, Moshiach, is described as a king, *Melech Hamoshiach*. Kingship occupies the highest spiritual position and not just as a concession to the weaknesses of the people because of their anarchistic tendencies.

Moreover, Chassidic philosophy explains that the function of the king is to bring all of his subjects to surrender themselves to G-d. Honoring a king is not honoring a human being; they are honoring G-d as represented by the king. Why then did we have to "borrow" royalty from the lowly nation of Moab?

The Role of a King

We may propose an answer derived from a basic understanding of the role of a king as opposed to another form of leadership.

Contrary to the belief that a king is an absolute monarch, free to do whatever he wants, the Torah places additional obligations and restrictions on a king that a commoner does not have.

For example, a king must have two Torah scrolls written, whereas everyone else can satisfy their obligation with one. Indeed, most people fulfill their obligation to write a Torah scroll, the Rebbe explained, by way of the communal Torah scrolls that we read from in our synagogues. A king, however, has no substitute for this Mitzvah; he must possess two Torahs. Moreover, the king must carry his special Torah scroll with him all the days of his life.

A king has additional restrictions. He may not amass too many horses, gold and silver. Although polygamy was permitted for everyone, without limit to the number of wives a commoner could marry, the king has a restriction on the number of his wives.

King Solomon violated that requirement because he thought that it will not lead him astray—the rationale given for this restriction. But he was indeed adversely affected by this failure.

In short, a king is subject to more requirements than everyone else.

Neither may a king impose his position on the people. Even king David, anointed by the prophet Shmuel at the behest of G-d, did not acquire the full status of king until the people demanded it of him. A dictator who imposes his will on the people is just that, a dictator; there is no relationship between the dictator and the people. In fact they are worlds apart because his power and leadership comes from his own might and coercion and nothing from the people.

"There is no King without a Nation"

By contrast, in Jewish law a king has a powerfully close relationship with his flock and they with him.

This is the meaning of the well-known expression, "there is no king without a nation." This does not simply mean that you cannot be king over yourself; it means that a king depends on the will, devotion and empowerment from his nation to be a true monarch.

The relationship between a monarch and his people is even more complex.

Chassidic thought describes the various faculties of the soul. For example, we all possess the trait of kindness and love though it may lie dormant in our sub-conscious. A little

praise from others could do wonders in aiding us to actualize that trait. It may take praise or seeing the pitiful state of a hungry beggar to evoke feelings of kindness and compassion. But if we possess that trait—and most of us do—it does not take too much of a stimulus to elicit it.

Even our intellectual powers may need some prodding by others to help us in actualizing our intellect, as well as other talents. That is why we are so often counselled to give our children and students, among others, positive reinforcement. Praise is the excavating tool that helps us uncover our own talents and virtues.

There is one exception to this rule; the power of royalty. This power is so deeply rooted in a leader's consciousness that conventional methods of exposing it will not suffice. There is a much greater need for the people whom he will lead to unequivocally, totally, sincerely and voluntarily surrender themselves to him. Otherwise a king will not possess the requisite power of royalty.

This explains why the Torah describes the way subjects proclaimed "*Yechi Hamelech*-long live the king," especially at the time a king was crowned. They were not just expressing good wishes for good health and long life; they were actually bestowing upon him and channeling to him the life of a king by opening up heretofore totally concealed reservoirs of royal-life.

Borrowing from Moab to Help Reveal the Power of Monarchy

This may explain why royalty had to be "borrowed" from Moab. The power of royalty is difficult to actualize. It is so deeply ensconced in our soul's psyche that it required us to borrow this power from another source where it was far easier to reveal.

The above analysis describes a royalty that is holy and positive. There is also its counterpart in the world of impurity, which lies very close to the surface and is too easily expressed. It is the unbridled quest for power that most of humanity possesses in different measure. In this mode, royalty is not a virtue but a vice consistent with the saying "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

The need to borrow the power of royalty from other sources is a two-edged sword. While it can serve as a boost to actualizing one's latent power of royalty, it may also take the monarch in the opposite direction, in which he emulates the Moabite source of power.

This may shed some light on the shockingly evil monarchs who were direct descendants of King David. Menashe, the son of Hezekiah, the most righteous of kings, was diabolically evil for most of his life. He murdered his grandfather, the prophet Isaiah and brought idolatry to the Jewish people, among other atrocities.

This moral stain may be ascribed to the Moabite source of royalty. While it may have helped Hezekiah's forebears actualize their royal potential it took him in the opposite direction: tyranny.

Declaring Yechi to Moshiach

Since the power of legitimate royalty must come from the governed we can now understand our role *vis-à-vis* the ultimate monarch, Moshiach.

If every true monarch needs the input of the nation, it is no less true of Moshiach, the final and ultimate monarch. The higher a person's authority, the deeper the power of royalty is embedded in his soul, which requires greater effort on the part of the nation to have him actualize this power.

Moses did not accept the leadership position for a full week even after G-d "pleaded" with him to accept it.

The Rebbe added that since every Jew possesses a spark of Moshiach, we have an even greater role in enhancing Moshiach's life as a king, thereby empowering him to usher in the final Redemption.

For Moshiach to reveal himself we too must voluntarily and sincerely accept upon ourselves his leadership. Since Moshiach's role is to facilitate greater observance of Torah and Mitzvos, our acceptance of his authority entails a greater

commitment and dedication to Torah study and Mitzvah observance.

We also express our dedication to Moshiach and our desire for him to be fully revealed by declaring "*Yechi Hamelech*," which will help to enhance his life as the ultimate monarch who will usher in the final Redemption.